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Working With Flowers: An Analysis of Social, Cultural and Ethical Relations in Colombia and the UK

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Abstract

Cut flower production in Colombia has grown dramatically over the past forty years; meanwhile in the last decade consumption in the UK has almost doubled. Gender plays a central role in the industry since women provide the main labour force for production and are the main buyers and recipients of cut flowers. Conditions in the sector are characterised by widespread violations of labour rights and there is considerable academic and activist research in this area. However, the emphasis is on material factors with little attention paid to a cultural analysis of production. Moreover, analyses of production tend to ignore aspects of consumption in the North.

Cut flowers have a double life, as commodities and as gifts. They are material things that are shaped, made, cultivated and are replete with meanings; they are ‘cultural’ in the full sense of the word. This idea is central to the thesis, which combines a cultural and material analysis of interview material and secondary material gathered in Colombia and the UK. I examine the social relations of cut flower production and consumption and the prospects for cut flower campaigns to secure better living standards and working conditions for Colombian workers.

The research shows that little is known among ethical consumers in the UK about the characteristics of cut flower production. I argue that the positive meanings ascribed to flowers as gifts (love, sympathy etc.) obscure the processes under which the flowers are produced. In production, I show that actors have differing understandings of the cycles organising the labour process, depending on their position in the production hierarchy. Discourses around the ‘backwardness’ of workers are used by owners and managers to exclude workers from decision-making. These discourses are also used to co-opt aspects of the ethical trade language to implement a ‘home-grown’ programme, *Florverde*, one that I argue serves the interests of cut flower entrepreneurs and not of labour. The thesis concludes by considering the prospects for ethical cut flowers from Colombia.

GLOSSARY OF SPANISH TERMS

Aguapanela: brew from solidified sugar cane juice

Arepas: a type of maize bread similar to tortillas

Asocolflores: Association of Colombian Cut Flower Exporters

Barrios: neighbourhoods

Caja Agraria: Agricultural Savings Bank

Campesinas/os: peasant women/men

Carrera once: number eleven road

Chibchas: one of the main indigenous civilizations in Colombia

Compañera: comrade

Contratista: middleman

Cultivo: space under cultivation in the greenhouses where cut flowers are grown

Empanadas: filled pies similar to *samosas*

Festival de los silleteros: a competition parade of flower arrangements, usually with different themes carried out annually in Medellín

Florverde: Green Flower, an Asocolflores programme

Flora: flower company

Floristeria: flower shop, also is used by the workers to refer to the companies

Haciendas: extensions of land dedicated to cattle ranching or cultivation of crops such as sugar cane.

Hogares de Bienestar: kindergarten Welfare Department Programme

Gran Colombia: Spanish colonial administrative division formed by the countries of Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia

Guerrillera: belonging to a guerrilla group, revolutionary.

Incas: the main Indigenous civilization in Peru

La Sabana: the geographical area surrounding Bogotá

Labores culturales: manual tasks performed in agriculture

Los Llanos: eastern plains of Colombia

Mestiza: mixed ‘race’ person born of Spanish and indigenous parents

Mexica: Indigenous civilization in Mexico

Operarias/os: women/men workers

Patria: nation

Rebusque: to do whatever it takes, every kind of job available to survive

Terres de Hommes: international human rights NGO

ABBREVIATIONS

ATPA: Andean Trade Preference Act

CAID: Christian Aid

CC: Commodity circuits

CIIF: Comisión Interinstitucional de Flores (Interinstitutional Commission on Flowers)

CND: Commission for Nuclear Disarmament

CSM: Christian Science Monitor

DANE: Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (National Statistics Bureau)

EPZ: Export Processing Zone

ETI: Ethical Trading Initiative

FIAN: Food First Germany

FTZ: Free Trade Zone

GCC: Global Commodity Chain

ICC: International Code of Conduct for Cut Flowers

IMF: International Monetary Fund

ITC: International Trade Centre

LETs: Local Exchange Trading Schemes

MPS: Milieu Project Sierteelt (Floriculture Environment Project)

M&S: Marks and Spencer

MVWG: Monitoring and Verification Working Group

NGO: Non – Governmental Organisation

INTRODUCTION

I never look at the rose
To seek its perfect colour
I look at it because
It has the blood of those who dream
And because the hands of the person who planted it
Flowers in its branches

yo nunca miro a la rosa
por su color de quimera
la miro porque ella tiene
la sangre de los que sueñan
porque en sus gajos florecen
las manos del que la siembra

Para cantar he nacido (I was born to sing) by Horacio Banegas/ Mercedes Sosa

This research explores the gendered, classed, ‘racialised’ and globalised processes of production and consumption of cut flowers in two different social, economic and cultural locations, Colombia and the United Kingdom. Flowers are ‘cultural’ as well as ‘natural’ products. Cut flowers are not just ‘another’ commodity produced by international capital (such as shoes, clothes) for mass consumption, they are constructed as a ‘natural’ commodity, they are loaded with cultural meanings and they are often given as gifts, producing and reproducing social relationships between giver and receiver.

For centuries in Western societies, cut flowers have been used as gifts on special occasions to transmit feelings such as care, love and friendship, as part of strengthening or maintaining social relations, to mark important events in people’s lives such as births, birthdays, weddings and funerals. They have also been used as elements of display and decoration, for example, in homes, buildings, churches and offices. The emphasis has been on what is done with flowers, not how they are produced, indeed the assumption may be that they are simply plucked from nature. In fact, the cut flowers on sale in the UK today are the product of a planned line of

production, standardised as far as possible to produce hundreds of thousands of almost identical stems.

Flowers are present at numerous special and non special occasions throughout the lives of people in the North (and South) and have recently become a currency of social exchange in the UK. From the death of Diana, Princess of Wales to the remembrance of the murder of Stephen Lawrence, to the protests for the various railway disasters, flowers have been used to express grief, affliction, anger, despair, and impotence but also to show nonconformity, defiance, stubbornness, and solidarity (Steinberg and Kean, 1999). Today in the UK, according to the International Labour Office (ILO):

Gift-giving (to congratulate, apologize, commiserate, and express love and affection) is the most frequently stated reason for buying flowers (over 70 per cent of all purchases in the United Kingdom and Austria; over 50 per cent on average). As such, flowers compete with wine and chocolates, which are bought for the same reason. Still, there are marked differences by country. (ILO, 2000: unnumbered)

One of the countries that has been providing flowers to the UK market for more than three decades is Colombia. Cut flower production in this country started in the 1960s as a development strategy championed by multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) but its expansion took place in the 1980s due to 'favourable' social, economic and political conditions such as female unemployment, low taxation and low import tariffs, availability of credit incentives and cheap 'natural' resources. Floriculture influences the life of thousands of Colombians who work directly in the industry or in jobs created around its trade. In

economic terms Colombian cut flower exports in the year 2001 reached US\$600 million (*Asocolflores*, no date), almost 5% of the total exports of the country.

Cut flower sales in the UK have doubled in the last 10 years (Adas horticulture, 1999: unnumbered), and the type and variety of flowers that the British public consumes has also increased. Increasing consumption of cut flowers in the UK could lead to the idea that access to the commodity has been democratised, such that it is accessible to a wider range of consumers. Meanwhile, the increasing production in Colombia could imply that Colombian workers are benefiting from employment opportunities, transfer of knowledge and technology and revenues from exports. A closer examination of this trade, however, suggests that access to a commodity such as cut flowers in the UK depends on the purchasing power of consumers and on the knowledge that they have about the transmissions of meanings through cut flowers. In Colombia, the product is produced under exploitative conditions and the benefits of increasing revenues for the companies do not reach the workers. Cut flowers are a gendered commodity. Women do the majority of work in the cut flower sector in Colombia and it is a commodity that is primarily bought by and for women in the UK. As do so many of the export-oriented industries analysed by feminist researchers working on trade-related employment, the cut flower industry takes advantage of the construction of women's labour as 'cheap' and 'docile'.

Documentation gathered by academics and activists has shown widespread violations of labour rights and other essential human rights in the Colombian cut flower sector. Such documentation has been central to the formation of campaigns to

raise public awareness within the main consumer countries, mostly in the North. In the past, Northern Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), southern NGOs and academics have joined efforts to denounce the working conditions within the cut flower industry in Colombia (Brassel and Rangel, 2001; Cactus, 1995 – 2000; Medrano, 1982; Salazar *et al*, 1995). Campaigns about the working and living conditions of workers in the cut flower industry in Colombia and elsewhere have been running in the UK and European countries, such as Germany, Switzerland, The Netherlands and Sweden, for more than a decade. I am part of these processes, having been involved in campaigning for more than six years and before that working for the Colombian NGO Cactus. Thus it was with some surprise that I realised that UK consumers of cut flowers are so little aware of the conditions of their production.

This thesis has both political and intellectual aims, offering an analysis of the production and consumption of cut flowers that may assist the future direction of the cut flower campaigns. It is based on primary research that I undertook with informants in the UK and in Colombia during a period of 12 months between February 2000 and March 2001, as well as on secondary material.

Chapter 1, the literature review, explores several sets of literature: cut flowers in Colombia; the meanings of flowers; the commodity chain concept; culture; consumption; the gift and the ethical consumerism movement. I argue that the literature on cut flowers in Colombia tends to analyse only the material conditions of the production processes, paying little regard to aspects of consumption in the North

or to the meanings of production. Meanwhile, the literature on consumption concentrates on material conditions and cultural aspects of consumption but hardly links them to production.

In my research I am concerned to explore the ways in which cut flowers are not only a consumption driven commodity (Hughes, 2000) but the product of complex economic, social and political relations between the places and people involved in production and the places and people involved in consumption. These processes cannot be separated. A promising theoretical starting point that analyses both processes, and in theory gives equal importance to each one, is the commodity chain concept. Following the work on cut flowers by Alex Hughes (2000) using this concept, and several studies relating to other commodities, I review the origins of the commodity chain concept and develop critiques of its different uses. I also consider how it might be used to analyse the circulation of cut flowers from a more holistic perspective. In the end, however, constraints of time and resources mean that I am unable to offer a full analysis of the cut flower commodity chain. Nonetheless, my research is informed by it and I seek, for example, to provide a cultural analysis of production.

Attempts to integrate production and consumption can also be found in the sphere of political activism. The ethical consumerism movement seeks to incorporate the material aspects of production in the meanings of the commodity that the consumer gets at the point of consumption. It seeks to use consumer power to influence the terms and conditions under which export-oriented products are produced. The

ethical consumerism movement has three streams: the fair trade movement, the ethical trading movement and the ethical consumer¹ movement. The ethical trading aspect, concerned with the working and living standards of wage workers, is very relevant to cut flowers. I review the origins and developments of ethical trading, and consider the potential of the ethical consumer movement to influence and change the distribution of benefits from the production and consumption of cut flowers.

In chapter 2, the methodology chapter, I deal with the original design of my research, the research questions and their transformation over time, the type and methods of research, how the informants were chosen, negotiation processes to access informants and the sample obtained. In the second part of the chapter I refer to the research/informant relations, issues about language and translation, ethical issues and the methods of analysis. My own involvement in the campaigns, as a researcher in the NGO Cactus in Colombia, then in the UK with Christian Aid as a member of the European Campaigns of Flowers and Women Working Worldwide, has influenced my perception of cut flowers as commodities and my capacity to access informants.

In chapter 3, Framing the Sector, I start with an overview of the importance of the cut flower trade at an international level and then I move to the social, economic and political factors that shape Colombian society and have allowed for the successful advent of cut flower cultivation and its expansion in the 1980s. Cut flower cultivation in Colombia has been described as a successful story by several authors, and I question the extent to which this is the case.

One of the central aims of chapter 4 is to explore the meanings of cut flowers for women workers in Colombia, whose voices have generally been absent from debates about the future of cut flowers. This chapter, *Working with Flowers*, examines the capitals (economic, social and cultural) that people have when entering the cut flower sector and how these holdings interact with structures in the wider society to determine their position in the social and labour hierarchy of the cut flower plantation. The second part of the chapter is focused on perceptions about the organization of their work, work hierarchies and working conditions from workers, supervisors and *cultivo* owners. This illustrates that there is no simple narrative about the processes of cut flower production; how it is characterised depends on the location of the respondent in the production hierarchy.

Chapter 5, the Politics of Consumption moves to the UK and explores the views of ethical consumers about cut flowers. One of the main purposes of this thesis is to investigate why cut flower campaigns have not been successful in the UK. I argue that the difficulties for campaigners in bringing across the material meanings of production stem at least in part from the positive cultural meanings that flowers have for the consumers as gifts. The meanings of cut flowers as a gift – love, affection, apology, sympathy, congratulation – predominate and are at odds with the meanings for workers at the point of production – overwork, poor wages, health concerns (as well as pride and satisfaction).

In Chapter 6, I seek to analyse the responses of the Colombian cut flower sector to the cut flower campaigns. Colombia's 'home-grown' response, *Florverde*, is compared to the International Code of Conduct (ICC) for cut flowers drawn up by the international campaign and based on ILO guidelines, and found seriously wanting. I also analyse one of *Florverde*'s social programmes: *Cultivemos la Paz en Familia* (Let's Cultivate Peace in the Family) and consider the workers' perception of the *Florverde* programme. I argue that *Florverde* is an attempt to co-opt some of the language of the cut flower campaigns in the interest not of workers but of maintaining/increasing market share. In my concluding chapter, apart from assessing the success of the thesis in answering the research questions that guide every chapter and the thesis' claims to originality, I will look at the possible strategies for continuing the dialogues for the transformation of relations in the cut flower industry.

This thesis aims to produce an integrated study of Colombia's cut flower industry; it is integrated in terms of the cultural and material aspects and meanings of production and consumption, and the production and circulation of cut flowers in commodity circuits and gift exchanges. Finally, it has the direct goal of expanding the knowledge base in this field by raising practical and political issues that I want to address to various actors in the cut flower industry. This is in keeping with the aims of Participatory Action Research which are a driving force throughout the thesis.

¹ The 'ethical consumer' is not only critical of his/her act of consumption, the impact that it has on the places of production and the people who produce it, but also the ethical consumer sees the possibilities of using her/his consumer power to change conditions under which the commodity/gift is produced. The ethical consumer integrates the meanings of production into her/his acts and meanings of consumption.

Chapter 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There are several, often quite diverse, sets of literature relevant to my project. I begin by considering the commodity chain concept and the argument that its use tends to privilege either the material or the symbolic aspects of commodities, but not both together. The tendency towards this split is also exemplified by consideration of studies of the cut flower sector in Colombia (privileging the material) and the literature on the meaning of flowers (privileging the symbolic). However, a closer examination of the concept of culture shows that its origins signal the integration of production and consumption, the material and the symbolic, rather than their separation. Thereafter the literature on the gift is examined, of relevance because cut flowers are typically purchased in order to be gifted. Finally attention is paid to the ethical consumerism movement, which is a politically motivated attempt to make the conditions of production of commodities part of their meaning at the point of consumption. This is particularly important because part of my project is to consider how best this movement might deal with cut flowers, in the interest of social justice for cut flower workers.

The commodity chain concept

The commodity chain concept takes into account various links between the development of international trade and the ‘development’ of the places where commodities originate, are processed, and are finally consumed. The concept has its

origin in dependency theory and world systems theory. Central to dependency theory is the work of Andre Gunder Frank (1969) and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1972), who contested the discourses of the modernisation paradigm. They argued that 'underdevelopment' was not due to a deficiency in the implementation of 'modern' values in the Third World. They rather considered that the political and economic influence of advanced countries, and their structures of colonialism and western mercantilism, had created massive and persistent poverty in countries like Argentina, Peru, Chile and Brazil (Webster, 1990:85). For Frank, colonialism and the evolution of commerce imposed a specialisation in the production of a limited range of goods, mainly raw materials, in Third World countries.

The world systems theory developed by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) offers a more sophisticated attempt to explain global patterns of inequality. Wallerstein argues that since the 16th century the expansion of capitalism around the world has implemented a very particular set of economic and political connections. The capitalist world economy was made up of the core countries (which correspond roughly to Frank's metropolitan centre) which had emerging manufacturing industries, fairly advanced forms of agricultural production, and centralised government. The semi-periphery of the core countries was originally, i.e. in the 16th century, considered to be the south of Europe, where countries were interconnected with the northern states by various forms of trading relationships and their economies were relatively stagnant. Meanwhile, the original periphery of the world economy was located in the neighbouring regions of Eastern Europe, where countries like Poland supplied cash crops to the core countries (Wallerstein, 1974). The equivalent periphery of today

would be countries in Africa and Latin America, still producing cash crops such as cut flowers, bananas, table grapes, coffee and tea. The world systems theory suggests changes over time in the countries that occupy the core, semi-periphery and periphery. These changes in location depend mostly on how the countries are inserted in the international economic system, an insertion influenced by colonial legacies but not 'static' due to the need for capital to maximise profits.

The commodity chain concept builds on world system theory and dependency theory, which are structuralist approaches set up in opposition to the neo-classical economics underlying modernisation theory. Instead of working at the level of countries and their insertion within the world economic system, however, the commodity chain examines a particular good, a commodity, in a transnational way. The commodity chain concept emphasises *processes* as a whole, where labour and capital are part of these processes. Deborah Leslie and Suzanne Reimer (1999) identify three types of commodity chain analysis: the Global Commodity Chain (GCC), the Systems of Provision and the Commodity Circuits (CC) or Circuits of Culture.

The GCC analysis emphasises the importance of looking at material factors in the production processes, as Hopkins and Wallerstein (1986:159) do when describing the commodity chain as 'a network of labor and production processes whose end results in a finished commodity'. They argue further that 'by tracing the networks of these commodity chains, one can track the ongoing division and integration of labor

processes and thus monitor the constant development and transformation of the world-economy's production system' (1986:18).

Hopkins and Wallerstein's privileging of the production side of the chain over the consumption side is criticised by Leslie and Reimer, who warn that: 'within the GCC...accounts often treat consumption as a starting point from which to trace relations back to the underlying exploitative reality of production...points of distribution and consumption are merely noted at the outset before commencing the real task of unveiling production and extraction' (1999:404-405). The GCC approach also privileges horizontal analyses that 'start from one particular factor influencing consumption and then generalise it across the economy as a whole' (Leslie and Reimer, 1999:405).

The second approach that Leslie and Reimer have identified is that of the systems of provision, exemplified in the work of Fine and Leopold (1993) who criticise 'horizontal' analyses of consumption. Instead, they argue for a 'vertical' approach:

[W]hich does not isolate common aspects of consumption but instead pinpoints differences in the ways in which production and consumption are linked in various commodities. Different systems of provision are the consequence of distinct relationships between material and cultural practices spanning the production, distribution and consumption of goods. (Fine and Leopold cited in Leslie and Reimer, 1999:405)

The third approach is that of commodity circuits (CC), which some authors also refer to as circuits of culture. The CC approach is almost exclusively focused on the consumption side of the chain. Alex Hughes explains that:

To counter approaches to the commodity chain that aim always to ‘unveil’ the economic realities existing at the site of production, both Crang (1996) and Jackson (1999) develop the literature on commodity cultures by suggesting that it is more fruitful instead to consider the complex ways in which goods are displaced from one site to the other, and the ways in which various cultural knowledges inform and are informed by, this process of displacement... Studies of circuits of culture, more specifically, examine how meanings attached to goods get moved around the different phases of commodity circulation, for example between producers and consumers of advertising. (Hughes, 2000:177)

Leslie and Reimer go on to state that ‘Miller (1995) views consumption rather than production as the new vanguard of history and as a key site through which political options must be articulated’ (1999:401). The advocates of the Ethical Consumerism movement to which I will refer in the last section of the chapter, take similar stances. However, Leslie and Reimer warn about the problems of concentrating almost exclusively on the dynamics of the consumption processes. One of the problems is that in losing the view over the foreground of exploitation in production, we might be losing the point of the commodity chain approach in the first place and its origins in world systems theory:

One concern raised by the notion of circuitry, however, is whether renouncing the language of the commodity “chain” means abandoning a language around which we can mobilise. The conceptualisation of a “*virtually endless* circuit of consumption” (Jackson and Thrift, 1995:205; emphasis added) may involve the loss of an important political stance: the foregrounding of exploitation. It is for this reason that we are hesitant to abandon the concept of chain altogether. Aesthetic reflexivity can be an important first step to action but does not always lead to resistance. Furthermore, if the aim of the commodity chain analysis is no longer to determine what forces are driving the chain, we are left with the question as to why chains should be reconstructed at all. (Leslie and Reimer, 1999:407)

Thus commodity chain analysis seems to divide the CC into two main processes of production and consumption. And the division into these two processes is influenced

by the tools of analysis used for each division of the chain. Apart from the authors mentioned above, others, such as Suzanne Wilson and Marta Zambrano (1994), Victoria Carty (1997) and Elaine Hartwick (1998) have also analysed production processes through 'material' conditions and consumption processes through 'cultural' aspects.

Angela McRobbie questions this division when she states that:

One of the most problematic spaces within consumption debates concerns the gap between materialist analyses which often ignore the symbolic meanings of commodities, and culturalist writings which often remain "sociologically ungrounded" in that they fail to engage with questions of poverty, exploitation and differential opportunities for consumption. (McRobbie, 1997 cited in Leslie and Reimer, 1999:402)

The division between material analyses of production and cultural analyses of consumption is accentuated through the geographical placement of the processes of production in the South and the processes of consumption in the North by almost all the writers on commodity chains (see for example Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1986; Wilson and Zambrano, 1994; Carty 1997; Hartwick, 1998; Leslie and Reimer, 1999 and Hughes 2000). By locating consumption geographically and ideologically in the North, and highlighting cultural aspects in the analysis, it implies that there is a higher degree of cultural heterogeneity there than in the South, where only material conditions of production tend to be taken into account. Locating the production side of the chain in the South and only analysing the material factors of production implies that no transformation of meanings of the commodity takes place in the South. Just the production of 'raw' materials is possible there, thereby perpetuating the 'role' given to the Southern countries within the international division of labour.

An interesting exception is the work of Barrientos and Perrons (1999), who follow the fruit commodity chain from Chile to the UK. Their work analyses the gender relations sustained within agricultural production in the South and retailing in the North but without reference to cultural issues in either geographical area.

Cut flowers in Colombia

This association between production-south and consumption-north figures prominently in the literature on the cut flower sector in Colombia. There have been two main waves of research on the material aspects of production of cut flowers. The first one at the beginning of the 1980s coincided with a period of intense trade union work in Colombia concerning cut flowers. The second wave at the beginning of the 1990s revolved round the collaborative work between trade unions and NGOs that attracted national and international attention to the Colombian flower sector. The priorities of the research have changed over time, in some cases reflecting Northern concerns by bringing to the fore issues such as environment, child labour and gender relations.

The research was firstly concerned with the terms of incorporation of Colombian women into export led industrialisation employment, considered within a wider agenda of thinking about the process of 'development' and the insertion of Colombia in the world economy in the 1970s and 1980s. The literature on women's export-oriented employment was influenced by dependency theorists as well as by the debates on women and development pioneered by Esther Boserup (1970). While Boserup maintained that

development had *marginalised* women from its benefits, Helen Safa (1981) argued that the incorporation of women in wage labour in Latin America has to be analysed in its historical context; and Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson (1981) analysed the relations through which women are *integrated* into development processes but on disadvantageous terms.

Colombian authors such as Sonia Cuares (1981), Diana Medrano (1980 and 1982), Mara Viveros (1982) and Rodrigo Villar (1982) raised issues of women's labour exploitation and concerns about the proletarianisation of women. They argued that such proletarianisation was accelerated by demographic changes in the rural and urban sectors which, in the absence of radical reforms such as agrarian reforms, were 'freeing' women's labour for use in agro-industries and other industries. Wider political concerns about redistribution and social justice shifted later to concerns about health issues and conditions in the workplace, as incorporated in the research of Medrano and Villar (1983).

At the start of the 1990s, and mainly due to trade union and NGO exposés about working conditions in the cut flower sector, some Northern development agencies undertook research in Colombia and pointed at child labour as one of the main problems of the sector (Stewart, 1994). The issue of child labour was a research priority for Maritza Diaz and Humberto Rojas (1994), and was included in the collective research done from 1992 to 1994 by Maria Cristina Salazar *et al* (1995). At the beginning of the 1990s environmental issues as well as a socio economic history of the sector were the main focus of Gustavo Montañez's (1992) research.

By the second half of the 1990s, Nora Leon (1996) was analysing the insertion of Colombian cut flowers within the international market and Verena Meier (1999) and Olga Ortiz (2000) analysed the changing gender relations within the sector.

For the purposes of this review I will concentrate on the research done by Salazar *et al* (1995) because I consider it to be one of the most comprehensive efforts to map the cut flower sector from different perspectives and disciplines. Ortiz (2000) participated in Salazar's research team and after the initiative ended she carried on working on the sector as a researcher and activist. Her 2000 article for FIAN is the summary of her BA dissertation based on the research. Meier (1995; 1999) also undertook original research during her visits to Colombia although this relied on the analysis of secondary information. Meier uses the body of literature on gender and export-oriented employment to analyse how beneficial the employment offered by the cut flower sector is for women. She analyses the impact on women from different backgrounds: women workers as well as upper class businesswomen, social workers, psychologists and doctors, among others.

Salazar *et al*'s project involved researchers from diverse disciplines and backgrounds - trade unionists, women workers, anthropologists, sociologists, medical doctors and social workers - applying Participatory Action Research (PAR) in a two year study of the characteristics of the cut flower sector. It was a collective project that reflected the working and research ideology behind the umbrella initiative that grouped organisations and trade unions from the sector in the *Comisión Interinstitucional de Flores* (Inter-institutional Commission of Flowers)

(CIIF). The project intended to cover three phases, the first one the study, the second to extend the results and methodology of the study to analyse six cut flower companies and in the third phase to extend the study to all the companies in the sector. Lack of funding made only the initial phase of the research possible and the result of the study was an unpublished paper containing the methodology used in the study; the context and background of Madrid, one of the municipalities where cut flowers are grown; gender aspects; labour conditions; child labour issues; contracting systems used in the sector; the union movement; the Colombian cut flower sector in the international market and an evaluation of the project. The document was intended to be used as an introductory tool to the study of the cut flower sector (Salazar *et al*, 1995: 14).

Concentrating on the analysis of neighbourhoods (*barrios*) allowed the researchers not only to study the working conditions in the workplace but also the relations between the type of employment and the living conditions of the workers; and how this employment had reinforced or weakened the effect of structures such as paternalism and economic and social policies. They investigated the history of the *barrios*, geographical characteristics, the natural resources they had before and after the cut flower industry settled in the area, the migration patterns of the workers, the type of housing the workers are living in and the relations within the households. Then they concentrated on the inhabitants of the households commonly composed of entire families living in one room headed by a woman, with children or a group of sisters. They analysed the filial relationships among the members of the household,

as well as changes in the composition of the families, from nuclear or extended families in their place of origin to female-headed households in the *barrios*.

The authors went on to research the conditions of women's incorporation into the sector. They argue that the Colombian flower export model is based on the expansion of working hours, what used to be overtime is now included within normal working hours, the use of temporary employment for routine tasks and the loss of purchasing capacity by the minimum wage due to inflation (1995:36). There are contradictions, they argue, between the goals of capital of making profits and the requirements of means and services for the reproduction of the labour force. This contradiction is solved, in the cut flower companies, by exacerbating and taking advantage of the gender inequalities that place social reproductive responsibilities almost exclusively on women. The domestic unit therefore assumes costs for which neither the state nor capital take responsibility (1995:36). They explain that the demand for female labour has been based on three aspects:

Firstly the belief that women have more manual dexterity ('nimble fingers') than men; secondly the assumption that women are 'naturally' predisposed, due to their dexterity and physical resistance, to perform agricultural tasks and since they have migrated from rural areas, it is considered that their training is, therefore, minimal and swift and thirdly the assumption that women are more docile and less confrontational [than men] in claiming their labour rights. In general these assumptions are convenient for the flower companies and are the reasons why they offer employment to women workers. The cut flower industry takes into account this profile to employ women but it is also interested in maintaining it like that. Dexterity, endurance and docility are in the employers' opinion, the main characteristics of women workers. (1995:37 *my translation*)

Salazar *et al* conclude that in spite of the differences between the *barrios*, they share a lack of fulfilment of the worker's basic needs that limits the quality of life of the

workers. The municipality does not have the resources to attend to the needs of the increasing population because cut flower companies are exempt from paying taxes and the workers, in spite of earning a minimum wage, cannot enjoy a minimum quality of life.

They maintain that:

Conditions of poverty and instability generate a constant fear of losing what they have: the place where they live, their jobs, their partners, their children's place in the kindergarten or school, their dignity and their respect. This constant anxiety generates not only isolation and lack of solidarity but also fear. They do not say what they are thinking, they do not talk with people who are 'marked' by the companies, they do not question orders or situations, they do not ask anything because of the fear of losing the few things they already have. (1995:38 *my translation*)

Ortiz (2000) also works around structural and individual aspects of fear that tend to regulate women workers' lives. She argues that cut flower production has benefited from the abundance of cheap, mainly migrant, labour; and also from economic incentives from the state and the international development bodies. One of the state incentives is tax exemption, not only in production activities which are considered to be an agricultural activity rather than industrial for tax purposes, but also exemption from taxes for goods related to cut flower production such as chemicals. Cut flower production also benefits from low import tariffs in Europe and the USA. She considers that 'cut flower production has had a severe impact in the region and its impact is increasing as cut flower production expands in the area' (2000:4). She maintains that the more visible environmental impact is exhaustion and pollution of water sources. Excessive use of chemicals that are highly toxic for both human beings and the environment has accounted for several cases of ill and incapacitated workers, but in the absence of scientific research it has been difficult to prove the

direct relation between the use of these pesticides and the cases that the workers present. However, she argues that one of the most destabilising aspects has been how the industry has taken advantage of the flexibilisation of labour practices and the proliferation of subcontracting systems. She argues that the flexibilisation of labour has allowed for:

[An] increase in working exigencies such as speed of work, quality and overtime. Wages are far below the required income to support a family. Flexibilisation of labour has generated a high turnover of workers and women are the ones who have been forced to cope with these poor conditions. (2000:5 *my translation*)

Women workers have to cope with working exigencies because of the lack of protection of their rights by the state. In these conditions they also have to assume the care, education and socialisation of children and this has exacerbated the already depleted working and living conditions of the workers:

They live in the poorest neighbourhoods of the municipalities in La Sabana, they lack the capacity to accumulate savings, suffer from frequent illnesses such as bronchitis, dermatitis and headaches, due to contact with pesticides. They also suffer from spine and joint problems caused by the position that the body has to adopt to carry out the cut flower tasks. Workers' households are characterised by high levels of domestic violence and relationship instability. (2000:5 *my translation*)

Similarly, Meier concludes that women workers, although gaining income and status through their work, pay for it with a double work load, unemployment risks and poor and problematic living conditions, resulting in constant health problems (1999:273, 287). I will come back to Meier's work to analyse her views on how successful the cut flower employment is for women in Colombia. In addition to the above-mentioned research carried out in Colombia, new research on the Kenyan flower industry has been undertaken at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex (Smith, 2003; Barrientos, 2003) and by Theon (forthcoming).

All the above constitute an important body of work that has done much to highlight the position of cut flower workers. However, what is interesting about all of this research is that authors tend to prioritise the analysis of the *material* conditions of production. Part of this research considers the importance of peak periods such as Valentine's Day and Mother's Day in the consumer countries, as times of extra work and extra income for producers. The research also analyses the potential for consumers to be involved in international campaigns around labour and the environment. Beyond these issues, however, there is little mention of the consumption side of the cut flower industry. There is a geographical as well as a theoretical separation of the processes of production and consumption. Production is located in the South (ignoring processes of production in the UK, e.g. the work of women flower packers and florists) and the analysis concentrates on the economics of production, the material relations. To address issues around the consumption of cut flowers it is necessary to turn to studies of western Europe.

The meaning of flowers and the social relations that cut flowers sustain

The literature on flowers indicates that they have long been central in religious ceremonies and other life marking occasions. Cut flowers as a finished commodity do not generally contribute further to processes of production and reproduction (apart from through medical usage). They cannot be eaten, accumulated or stored. They have a short life and their value as a finished commodity is also perhaps primarily a symbolic value. In the neo-classical tradition as argued by Micaela Di Leonardo (1995), flowers can be seen as sustaining social relationships, outside

economic activity. Nevertheless, the meanings of cut flowers are always influenced by consumption behaviour and production processes.

Jack Goody, in his book *The Culture of Flowers*, points to the historical origins of the word 'culture':

In the vocabulary which English and French alike inherit from Latin, culture also has to do with the cultivation of the soil, with the growing of plants...in a derived sense the word relates to the 'cultivation' of manners, of ways of behaving, especially of elaborated ways, those that have been carefully tended...So too, in the minds of many, it is the notion of attending to the growth of plants, which is never a purely and automatic, material or technological pursuit, being always guided by man's knowledge and by his intentions, requiring a complex social and cultural organisation of production. The growing of flowers is obviously affected not only by utilitarian considerations but by aesthetic demands, by the meanings allotted to them and the level of horticulture and "civilisation" in general. (Goody, 1993:26)

Goody asks 'is the culture of flowers universal?' (1993:1). He starts by explaining how he intends to use the word 'culture':

In ordinary life and in academic talk the word 'culture' is used in a variety of ways, mostly unsatisfactorily. I have employed the term as a sign post to an arena of human performance, very much part of the social and in no sense opposed in the way that some try to mark out a cultural from a social history, anthropology or sociology. (Goody, 1993: xvii)

Once he has established his meaning of culture he proceeds with the rest of the question: the 'universality' of the culture of flowers. The universality in the question, he remarks, does not only refer to the 'Western' world. He brings examples from places in Africa which help in showing that there might not be such a thing as a 'universal' culture of flowers, since there is in Africa a minimal physical and representative presence of flowers. In contrast, Goody highlights the richness of uses and meanings of flowers in Asia, disrupting the idea that 'cultural'

heterogeneity only takes place in the sites of consumption in the North (i.e. the 'Western' world).

The meanings and uses of cut flowers in the 'Western' world have not been static, exempt from change. On the contrary, the history of flowers is full of evidence of their presence in the every day, physically as well as in their representations. In the 'Western' world the ornamental meaning that flowers have nowadays has suffered a long transformation. Goody explains that 'historically the 'flower' seems first to have been the promise of fruit, not a thing itself' (1993:17):

As a bud, a forerunner, the flower is 'the essence', one of its central meanings in English as in French (*la quintessence*)...but both in Latin and French the flower is not only the essence but at times the surface (*fleur d'eau*) like the blossom in English – *le velouté, le duvet du raisin, d'une pêche*. The logic lies in the flower being a reproductive organ, coloured and perfumed for that end, so that what is displayed is also the means of reproduction; the surface is at the same time the essence, or becomes so when it gives way to fruit and seeds which in the hands of renaissance scholars such as Cesalpino came to be the basis of later botanical classification. (Goody, 1993:5)

The symbolic value of cut flowers, therefore, is not ahistorical. Goody argues that flowers do not have an intrinsic symbolism attached to them and that people's perceptions of the use and suitability of cut flowers for different occasions may differ. He proposes some of the origins of the 'language of flowers' and concludes that it has its roots in 'a manner of communicating by means of objects' (1993:233). Goody argues that this language was part of the general trend in the eighteenth century of classifying plants, flowers, etc., in order to understand their scientific uses and social purposes. He notes that writers in the eighteenth-century, such as Mary Wortley, often reported their fascination with the 'secrets' of the Orient.

Based on the work of other authors, such as Hammer, Goody notes that the language of flowers 'might be a means whereby those shut away communicated with the outside world' (1993:234). He argues that it was not a language for communication between women and men, as much as a language known only to women, who 'invented it in the leisure of their lonely life, and who employ[ed] it as amusement, or as a code for lesbian attachments' (Hammer cited in Goody, 1993:234).

These symbolisms, however, were not exempt from gender stereotypes. Flower metaphors abound in every day life, as well as in literature and other forms of artistic creation, to control, through sanction or reward, women's sexuality. Goody makes a direct link between the reproductive function of flowers and the assumption that reproduction is the only sexual role permitted to women:

It is perhaps the connection of the flower with generation that has given the name of 'flowers' to the menstrual activity of a woman, but the notion of the deflowering of a virgin, the breaking of her hymen through sexual penetration, has more to do with the plucking of a flower, the taking away of her 'essence' (as a virgin), leading to her 'blossoming forth' as a woman. Like a flower, she may of course blossom too much and becomes 'full-blown', 'over-blown'; even 'blowzy' or 'blousy', a word possibly deriving from the verb, to blow, meaning to bloom, as in Shakespeare's line 'I know a bank where on the wild thyme blows' (Midsummer Night's Dream, II.i.249), giving the nouns 'blowing', a bloom, and 'blowe'" and possibly 'blowze', a whore. (Goody, 1993:5)

On a more recent meaning and use of flowers, Goody states that the utilitarian face of the flowers (i.e. being the promise of a fruit) seems to have been transformed into the merely ornamental display of the flowers. It could also be argued that because their reproductive function (i.e. the fruit) is generally not seen, flowers are no longer a symbol of sexuality. However, in the merely ornamental role of the flower it is

possible to see a more subtle display of sexuality. Goody argues that the displacement of the allotment to the backyard could be a metaphor for the replacement of the essence by the surface, the contents by the appearance:

To the West European of today, flower means primarily 'ornamental flower'...the very word garden, as in 'an English garden', tends to conjure up the decorative rather than the productive aspects of cottage horticulture. Garden flowers are for display; the vegetable garden tends to be hidden behind a walled enclosure in country houses, allocated to the bottom of the lawn in suburban dwellings, pushed out to the allotment in council houses...Flowers, on the other hand, are displayed in front (and back) gardens, inside houses, publicly in municipal gardens and country houses, competitively at upper-class events like the Chelsea Flower Show, formally opened by royalty. (Goody, 1993:4)

The meanings and uses of flowers are the products of cultures, variable across time and space. As the term 'culture' itself, they could also be part of the discourses and ideologies that allow societies to maintain or to dismantle social and economic hierarchies. Leslie and Reimer remind us that: 'different commodities are ideologically constructed according to varying logics. Thus it is important to trace not only commodities, but also discourses, knowledges and representations through systems of provision' (1999:405).

In the next section I am going to examine the word 'culture', arguing that it is important to contrast the meanings of culture that have been used in approaches such as the commodity chain with the historical meanings of the word, as well as other meanings within different disciplines of research. What emerges is a more integrated concept, concerned with the material as well as the symbolic.

Culture

Raymond Williams states that ‘culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language’ (1990:87). He identifies several meanings of culture, beginning with the one that is perhaps most commonplace, and which honours it with a capital: Culture. Culture in this sense refers to what Matthew Arnold famously described as ‘the best which has been thought and said in the world’ (Arnold, 1960). He brings this conceptualisation to our attention because of its extended use, whereby a hierarchy of culture is implied.

More significant for Williams is what he terms its anthropological definition, where culture is found not only in the products of the mind but in the everyday social practices and habits of societies. In this sense, ‘Culture’ does not privilege what is considered ‘high’ but draws attention to culture as a ‘whole way of life’. For Williams (1958), ‘culture is ordinary’. It includes ordinary, everyday objects as well as objects of art. It is material as well as symbolic.

Williams explains that this separation of the meanings of culture mirrors the separation present in academic disciplines:

It is especially interesting that in archaeology and in *cultural anthropology* the reference to culture or a culture is primarily to *material* production, while in history and *cultural studies* the reference is primarily to *symbolic* systems. This often confuses but even more often conceals the central question of the relations between ‘material’ and ‘symbolic’ production, which in some recent arguments – cf. my own *Cultura* have always to be related rather than contrasted. (1990:91, *emphasis in the original*)

Terry Lovell (1995) elaborates on this distinction, arguing that ‘culture’ is commonly opposed to ‘nature’. In the meanings ascribed to ‘culture’ there are overlapping boundaries between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ that are very often forgotten or ignored:

One of culture’s opposed pairs is ‘nature’, but when we remember the originating horticultural metaphor, the distinction between a ‘natural world’ untouched by culture – the wilderness as opposed to the garden - the ravaging proclivities of ‘culture’ become manifest. These days nothing is left to grow, untouched, outside the garden wall of culture. The wilderness has retreated. (Lovell, 1995:xvi)

Williams (1990) explains this originating metaphor:

Culture in all its early uses was a noun of process: the tending of something, basically crops or animals...from eC16 the tending of natural growth was extended to a process of human development, and this, alongside the original meaning in husbandry, was the main sense until 1C18 and eC19...At various points in this development two crucial changes occurred: first, a degree of habituation to the metaphor, which made the sense of human tending direct; second, an extension of particular processes to a general process, which the word could abstractly carry. (Williams, 1990:88)

Thus, the origins of the word suggest a very ‘material’ culture and a more extended and democratic one than the predominant meanings discussed above, that define culture as a product of the mind. We can see, therefore, that there are not clear boundaries whereby we can separate the cultural from the material. As Andermahr *et al* suggest:

With this very physical origin in mind, it may at once be seen that nature/culture does not align itself neatly with the material and the non-material or mental. Rather it points towards that which is ‘man-made’ rather than ‘found’ (Andermahr et al 1997:42).

The existence of ‘pure nature’ is therefore questioned, as is its opposition to pure culture:

The writers Braidotti (1995) and Haraway (1991) make much of the fact that the very tools which have been developed for the analysis of the natural, the concepts and methods of science, are themselves cultural, and as Emily Martin and others have shown in the case of biological sciences, suffused with gender hierarchies and stereotypes. (Lovell, 1995:xvi)

A commodity that might be considered as an exemplary 'cultural' object is the cut flower. Cut flowers might be perceived as 'natural' but they are nevertheless 'made' in the sense that they are 'cultivated'. Moreover, cultivation is the result of the cultural processes of years of researching, experimenting in cross-fertilisation, and tending of their varieties. Cut flowers are material, physical things that are shaped, made, cultivated, and that are replete with meanings. They are 'cultural' in the full sense of the word.

In the next section I discuss some aspects regarding the meanings and transformations of 'consumption'.

Consumption

The term 'consumer society' is said to embody the claim that one of the characteristics that distinguishes capitalist societies is that they are increasingly organised around consumption rather than production (Abercrombie *et al*, 1994:83). They conclude that rising affluence and shorter working hours have allowed people to construct their identity not exclusively from work, but through leisure and consumer activity. They suggest that:

Because of the aestheticization of everyday life, there is more interest in the presentation of an image and the construction of a life-style, both of which involve the purchase of commodities of various kinds... Acts of consumption are increasingly used as markers of social position. People use 'positional

goods' to demonstrate their membership of particular social groups and to distinguish themselves from others. (Abercrombie *et al*, 1994:83-84)

Abercrombie *et al* recognise that although modern societies have some of these characteristics, it is not clear that they have all of them, what their significance might be in a given society, or if any particular society welcomes all these characteristics. They also highlight that 'it has been argued that class, race and gender continue to be amongst the most important sources of social differentiation, and that it is only a minority that are involved in the aestheticization of everyday life' (Abercrombie *et al*, 1994:84).

Other authors, such as Jean Baudrillard (1998), see consumption as a manifestation of the class institution, not as a separate source of social differentiation:

Consumption, like the education system, is a class institution: not only is there inequality before objects in the economic sense (the purchase, choice and use of objects are governed by purchasing power and by educational level, which is itself dependant upon class background, etc.) – in short, not everyone has the same objects, just as not everyone has the same educational chances - but more deeply, there is radical discrimination in the sense that only some people achieve mastery of an autonomous, rational logic of the elements of the environment (functional use, aesthetic organization, cultural accomplishment). Such people do not really deal with objects and do not, strictly speaking, 'consume', whilst the others are condemned to a magical economy, to the valorization of objects as such, and of all other things as objects (ideas, leisure, knowledge, culture): this fetishistic logic is, strictly, the ideology of consumption. (Baudrillard, 1998:59)

Baudrillard sees consumption as a result of alienating processes very much identified with capitalism, but he also sees consumption itself as a tool of alienation. The capitalist structure is divided into classes and consumption is the product of these class structures, but at the same time helps to maintain them as such.

‘Mastery’, then depends on social class and social positioning. Members of a more privileged social class achieve mastery of the meanings because they have created and reproduced, through ‘high art’, mainstream mass media, literature, etc, the meanings ascribed to the objects. They, therefore, relate to objects through a process of thinking: of seeing beyond the objects. Using their intellect they relate to objects through the relations that the objects create, and therefore they can ascribe meanings to them. The rest of us who do not belong to the ideologically dominant classes, he argues, are condemned to passively swallowing the meanings that others create. These meanings are false meanings; we will never have access to the ‘real’ meanings of the objects and their relations because the ‘real’ meanings are used by the elite as both gatekeepers to keep us outside and markers of class through which they recognise themselves.

Baudrillard defines ‘consumption’ as a passive act, where the structures in place overwhelm the individual and drag her/him into the never ending wheels of consumption. For the individual, what is left is not resistance against the manipulative nature of the exercise, because we ‘do not know’ about it, but on the contrary, a false feeling of security, of belonging. Therefore, he argues that ‘consumption’ has a purpose:

So we live sheltered by signs, in the denial of the real. A miraculous security: when we look at the images of the world, who can distinguish this brief irruption of reality from the profound pleasure of not being there? The image, the sign, the message – all these things we ‘consume’- represent our tranquillity consecrated by distance from the world, a distance more comforted by the allusion to the real (even where the allusion is violent) than compromised by it. (Baudrillard, 1998:34)

This view of people as passive ‘consumers’ of the creations of others, of people as merely recipients, is contested by Janice Radway (1995) in her article ‘Reading is not Eating’. She begins by exploring the original meanings of consumption that refer to the processes of exhausting or using up materials. She argues that:

Because we are so familiar with the usage of the verb ‘to consume’ to refer to the process of purchasing an object made by another (in contradiction to the process of producing one’s own) we often forget that this form itself is a metaphorical transfer of a word that was originally employed to refer to fire or to other destructive natural forces which annihilated the elements upon which they acted. The point in extending its use to the process of purchase was to suggest that in personal consumption, one used up an object fully, thus exhausting its exchangeable value. (Radway, 1995:438)

This metaphorical transfer has a historical background and one in which the term ‘culture’ plays an important role. When Baudrillard is referring to the characteristics of people who ‘achieve mastery of an autonomous, rational logic of the elements of the environment’, he mentions cultural accomplishment as one of these characteristics. He refers to ‘culture’ as discussed by Williams in one of his extended definitions that sees culture as ‘the works and practices surrounding artistic and intellectual production’ (Williams, 1990). For Baudrillard, ‘true art’ is the critical art, that is, critically contesting or following positivist methods of enquiry about social realities. In this he follows in the tradition of Adorno and the Frankfurt School (Adorno, 1938). This is therefore, ‘high art’, and could provide tools for the description of the code. In her paper, Radway (1995) takes us on a trip to explore the historical reasons behind this metaphorical transference:

At pains to explain the rise of fascism in Germany, these intellectuals [the Frankfurt School] turned to the mass media and their cultural products as the principal culprits. Whereas true art challenged received ways of perceiving and invited readers to engage in a collaborative and hence productive attempt to imagine the new with the author, mass culture, they argue, lulled its users into

a state of somnolence, indolence and passive receptivity to the ideological propaganda of others. Not surprisingly, the metaphor of consumption was marshalled to characterise this process by which large numbers of users bought, in a dual sense, the ideas of others. (Radway, 1995:440)

Consumption then, became synonymous with passive reception of ideas and propaganda, whether supplied by the German National Socialist regime or by Western capitalism (and socialist societies). The passivity is said to be similar to a process of eating, but in this case not eating 'intelligently', which supposedly involves planning, inviting, preparing, slicing, cooking, decorating, dishing out, and talking over dessert, but eating 'fast food', which is among other things, consumed alone by the individual and does not elicit any conversation about the rituals of planning, preparing and enjoying the food.

This process involves the eating that Radway claims has been characterised as 'pre-digested', 'pap' or 'gruel'. It does not involve a lot of intellectual effort from the 'consumer':

What is most interesting about its use in this context, however, is the subtle shift in the metaphor away from reference to processes of exhausting or using up materials and toward the designation of the biological processes of ingestion, incorporation and absorption. In this variant, the consumption metaphor equates the process of perception and comprehension with that of eating. Consequently, mass culture has regularly been characterized as 'pre-digested' 'pap' or 'gruel' which is easily and commonly swallowed whole. (Radway, 1995:440)

The transfer of the metaphor of consumption to describe the social relationship between people and commodities in the act of purchasing objects, Radway argues, is a simplification of the complex social processes that these acts involve. This simplification of the processes also implies passivity, as stated before, on the part of the receptor (of the message/idea in the form of a commodity). The idea is of solitary

individuals being fed with manipulative ideas in the form of commodities, without the possibility of collective action because they are isolated one from another by the same alienating stuff that is feeding them. Radway argues that:

In the first place, to equate the activities of selection, purchase and use to the act of exhausting natural materials is to reduce a complex social process to a single physical event. Because it has been assumed for so long that consumption is indeed the conceptual opposite of production, scholars have also assumed quite unconsciously that the actual material and social processes of using mass-produced goods must be absolutely distinct from the material and social process of collective production and exchange. Thus the metaphor can be seen to have occluded certain questions and consequently to have obviated the need for empirical investigation of the way actual people engage with the cultural products they purchase from others. (Radway, 1995:439)

Radway explores the assumptions that the readers of mass produced literature are passive and have very little agency, finding on the contrary, that the readers have found ways of appropriating the act of reading romances for their own empowering purposes. There is the example of a woman reclaiming her own space and her own time away from domestic work to read the romances, and other examples of organisation and collective exchanges of experiences through the formation of romance reading clubs. Radway focuses not only on the meanings of the objects but also the social relations that the objects sustain. She argues that 'by focusing on social process – that is, on what people do with texts and objects rather than on those texts and objects themselves - we should begin to see that people do not ingest mass culture whole but often remake it into something they can use' (Radway, 1995:456).

The commodity chain theorists stress the division between the material (production) and cultural (consumption). For commodity chain analysis, it is at the consumption end of the chain that agency is primarily located. For Baudrillard, consumption is

passive and has therefore no real agency, while Radway restores agency to consumers. The metaphor of consumption allows us to analyse the 'consumption' of cut flowers. As discussed before, we do not simply consume flowers; flowers are not 'objects for consumption' but objects that take the form of commodities. How are they, therefore, 'consumed'? What is their use value?

The Gift

One key use that cut flowers have is that they circulate as gifts. Cut flowers carry an enormous weight of cultural meanings and they produce a range of social relationships through giving and receiving. The importance of the gift in social life is given widespread recognition in anthropological and historical literature; Claude Lévi-Strauss, for instance, argues that the idea of gift exchange is central to the realisation/reproduction and initiation of social bonds (Lévi-Strauss, 1949).

Phebe Lowell Bowditch (2001) argues, based on studies done by Paul Veyne (1990) and Murray (1990) that it is important to differentiate between gift economy and gift exchange. She states that 'a gift economy presumes the absence of real reciprocity - that is, the goods and services are incommensurable and cannot be acquired in any other way' and she highlights the asymmetry of the relationship whereby it 'results in each person offering something to which the other does not have access' (Lowell Bowditch, 2001: 42). By contrast, she cites Murray (1990) to argue that gift exchange implies a 'society half-way to becoming "rational" in our sense, since people could count the values in this exchange, and establish a market in the gift' (Lowell Bowditch, 2001:42). Therefore, the different social, economic and cultural

relationships between the giver or givers and the recipient or recipients of the gift determine the nature of the gift.

One form of social organisation that has gift relationships at its centre and has been much studied by anthropologists working with indigenous communities in North America, Melanesia and Polynesia is the *potlatch*. Marcel Mauss notes that '*potlatch* meant originally to "nourish" or to "consume" ...essentially usurious and extravagant, it is above all a struggle among nobles to determine their position in the hierarchy to the ultimate benefit, if they are successful, of their own clan' (Mauss, 1966:5).

Harris (1974) and Mauss (1966) have defined the *potlatch* as a competitive feast. In turns, chiefs of different communities organise enormous feasts and invite other chiefs and their communities and give to them as presents the best that has been produced, hunted, gathered, cultivated and woven. The guests have to eat, drink and wear the presents during the feast and even carry away with them the remains of the gifts offered by the host chief. The guest chiefs in turn have to return the compliment and organise future *potlatches* themselves or their status as members of the elite and their leadership are put into question. Mauss points out that 'two elements of the *potlatch* have in fact been attested to: the honour, prestige or *mana* which wealth confers; and the absolute obligation to make return gifts under the penalty of losing the *mana*, authority and wealth' (1966:6).

Competitive feasting was also a feature of other indigenous societies such as those present in Central America before the Spanish conquest. Pilcher (1998) comments that:

Competitive banqueting rose to a high art among Mexica nobles, who achieved status by holding lavish feasts. These events proved enormously expensive, for an ambitious host presented feathers, cloak and jewels to each of his guests. He also had to provide an elaborate menu with several stews, delicate tortillas, and costly chocolate. The rewards for a successful feast included 'recognition, fame and distinction'; while failure left a person 'shamed and belittled'. (Pilcher, 1998:15)

The *potlatch* then has been studied as a form of gift exchange among relative equals: between the chiefs and between the *Mexica* nobles. But it also has another dimension and it is that of operating as part of a gift economy as defined by Murray and Veine above.

A mix of gift exchange and gift economy, in terms of different actors being in different positions of power in the operation of the gift, is also present in Natalie Zemon Davies' study of the gift in sixteenth century France. She states that:

Busy though the gift networks were with holiday gifts, many presents changed hands irrespective of the rhythm of season and rite of passage. They were part of the complicated history of obligations and expectations between persons and households of roughly the same status, including those of kin, and between superiors and inferiors. (Davies, 2000:56)

Through gift exchange, systems such as patronage were 'carried on under the rhetoric of gifts even while the accounts of great households arranged their list of "pensions" and "dons" in a very businesslike manner' (Davies, 2000:62). She gives examples of how some sort of traffic of influences was oiled by the continuous alternation of gift, services and gratitude. Davies explains that 'when Brother Rene

Martin sought a vacant hermitage in Anjou from Francois de La Tremoille, he wrote the viscount “in humble” supplication”, promising to be “held and obliged” to pray for La Tremoille, his wife, and whole noble lineage for the rest of his days’ (Davies, 2000:62).

Davies also illustrates the gift process outside this system of patronage. To do that, she selects Gilles de Gouberville who ‘lived primarily from the rents and produce sales from his estates and, during some years, from his income as a local officer in the royal court supervising streams and forest. He was dependant on major figures not for pensions, but for more general favor and support’ (2000:63). Davies adds that ‘gift courtesy also established him as part of their noble world of honor’ (2000:63). Gilles de Gouberville established different gift patterns wherein the gifts moved downwards, upwards and horizontally. Davies explains how the gift relationship developed between Gouberville and two other persons of higher status:

[I]n each case, the relationship was more formal and less symmetrical than Gouberville’s exchange with his kinfolk, the timing of the gifts more artfully aimed at maintaining a tie without always being associated with a specific request or favour...with the duchess, Gouberville’s association began in January 1554, when he went to her chateau, dined there, and discussed a suit involving one of his tenants. The next day, he sent over a kid to Madame, the first of many kids from his flocks, capons from his barnyard, and leverets from his men’s hunting expeditions which flowed to her chateau over the seven years until her death in 1560. Madame de Saint-Paul sent a gift only once in return – some venison in 1560 - and she did not visit his manorhouse. Rather her chateau was open to him. (Davies, 2000:64)

In eighteenth century England, gift giving among elite women was also hierarchised and divided in terms of gift giving to kin, friends and servants (Vickery, 1998). Amanda Vickery studied letters, diaries and other documents left by numerous

people around Elizabeth Shackleton, and through them has reconstructed her and other women's every day lives and social, economic and cultural networks. Using the gift analysis she disentangles diverse forms of social relations, pointing out that 'through the exchange of compliments, gifts, dinners and teas with other elite families, the genteel reaffirmed their gentility and maintained a wide polite acquaintance' (1998:222).

Examples of how gift exchange helped to strengthen family and friend relationships abound. She points out that:

While demonstrating their expertise as fashionable consumers, Elizabeth [Shackleton's] friends also sent her sentimental gifts, for, as Jane Scrimshire remarked, '*small presents* Confirm friend [ship] (brackets in the original)'. Betsy Ramsden used the language of remembrance to recommend her offerings – 'I have taken the liberty to enclose a cap which you will do me Great Honour to except [sic]. It is by way of your seeing what Trimming will be wore in the second mourning. I do desire that you will wear it for my Sake and not put it in Lavender'. (Vickery, 1998: 222)

The gift relationships were part of other complicated sets of social relationships, for instance:

The exchange of compliments, gifts, visits and meals between elite families sustained the horizontal ties of polite friendship. Vertical relationships within the community were fostered through gracious hospitality dispensed in designated ways, or confined to the common parts of the house. Male association was reinforced over pre-expeditionary breakfast, while dinner fed polite, conversable couples. (Vickery, 1998: 209)

Some gift relations seem to have been used at will to distance or to revive ties with acquaintances and friends: 'a pointed failure to return compliments was one way to allow acquaintance to cool, conversely, associations could be warmed into friendship through the exchange of visits, gifts and parties' (Vickery, 1998: 205).

The indigenous chiefs, the Mexica nobles, Gilles de Gouberville and Elizabeth Shackleton used gifts as an important part of their social relationships with friends, kin, servants and persons of higher status. The question however is how did they know how to 'cash' the adequate value of a gift? How did they know when and how to use a gift appropriately to indicate distance, class superiority, affection, among others? We know that they knew how to recognise, use and enforce the social meanings of the gifts they were exchanging or allocating but how did they come to possess this knowledge?

Gift and gender

One aspect barely discussed by the authors mentioned is the gender dimension of gift-giving. Davies (2000), for example, points out the urgent need to do further research that incorporates gender analysis. Vickery's (1998) study is inscribed within the field of feminist history and is clearly differentiating the gendered social and economic roles that elite women and men played in constructing (and reproducing) their societies. There are insights into the (gendered) roles that servants and other actors from different social classes played in implementing their exchange of compliments, gifts, visits and meals and taking part in decision-making over the circulation and use of gifts. For example: 'when new commodities entered the household, whether bought, made or received as gifts, it was the mistress-housekeeper who decided their eventual destination' (Vickery, 1998:205). Such meticulous accounts not only draw attention to the rituals and the labour involved in the preparation and implementing of those social exchanges but also to the

documenting of those exchanges. In the studies of the *potlatch* however, there is little about the ‘backstage’ work of preparing, decorating, sweeping, cleaning and cooking for the festivals.

Di Leonardo (1995) argues that the gender dimension of activities such as gift-giving has not been taken into account and they are part of what she calls kin work. She argues that: ‘kin work is a key element that has been missing in the synthesis of the “household labor” and “domestic network” perspectives’ (Di Leonardo, 1995:443). Kin work is all the social duties such as writing post cards, birthday cards and Christmas celebrations that involve efforts in recording, planning and organising by the designated member of the household. These efforts may result in the strengthening of family ties and have traditionally been seen as women’s work. Di Leonardo demonstrates this by observing that ‘we think of kin-work tasks such as the preparations of ritual feasts, responsibility for holiday card lists, and gift buying as extensions of women’s domestic responsibilities for cooking, consumption and nurturance’ (1995:446). She goes on to explain that:

Maintaining these contacts, this sense of family, takes time, intention, and skill. We tend to think of human social and kin networks as epiphenomena of production and reproduction: the social traces created by our material lives. Or, in the Neo-classical tradition, we see them as part of leisure activities, outside an economic purview except insofar as they involve consumption behaviour. But the creation and maintenance of kin and quasi-kin networks in advanced industrial societies is work; and moreover, it is largely women’s work. (Di Leonardo, 1995:443)

Kin work does not have the recognition it deserves, Di Leonardo argues, and it might be because kin work is seen as part of the ‘duties’ of the woman of the

household, relying on the class background that the woman belongs to and therefore, seeming effortless and ‘natural’:

Kin work, then, takes place in an arena characterized simultaneously by cooperation and competition, by guilt and gratification. Like housework and child care, it is women’s work, with the same lack of clear-cut agreement concerning its proper components. How often should sheets be changed? When should children be toilet trained? Should an aunt send a niece a birthday present?... kin work is thus more easily cut back without social interference. On the other hand, the results of kin work – frequent kin contact and feelings of intimacy - are the subject of considerable cultural manipulation as indicators of family happiness. (Di Leonardo, 1995:446)

Gift purchasing, gift giving and the act of exchanging objects are central to sustain social relationships and in sustaining these social relationships tend to be seen as women’s work. The act of gift exchanging seems to have expanded and have coined fixed dates in the ‘Western’ calendars around the world, such as Christmas, New Year, Mother’s Day, Valentine’s Day and many more. Cut flowers are one of the most frequently exchanged gifts during these events, and as such they are massively produced and marketed: they are a commodity. There is some degree of tension when gifts take the form of commodities, tension between their use value and their exchange value. The meanings are difficult to control, to know fully, because they are diverse. Knowledge takes many forms. Therefore, it is difficult to claim authority in terms of significance in everyday life.

Flowers that might have one meaning for the community that both produces and exchanges them, might be transformed if those flowers became a commodity in a chain across the globe. As we trace the process of movement of the flower from the grower, it creates links between many more people than the people whose

relationship is expressed in giving and receiving flowers. Flowers undergo transformation, from products to commodities and into gifts. In the progress from the point of production to the point of consumption an accumulation of social relationships go through the chain. These relationships are invisible to the parties who take part in the gift relationship at the point of 'consumption'. The aim of my research is to uncover some of the social relationships that flowers represent, to make them visible. In doing so it is important to ask what social relationships the flowers sustain at the point of production, when they are not yet gifts but commodities. Does flower production generate different social relationships between those engaged in their production than say for those making Nike shoes? How have changes in the organisation of flower production affected those social relationships? One of the movements that is promoting the visibility of the social relationships between producers and consumers is the Ethical Consumerism movement discussed in the next section. Particular attention is paid to the ethics of giving when the gift has the form of a commodity.

Ethical consumerism

Tallontire, Rentsendorj and Blowfield maintain that 'definitions used in studies of ethical consumerism vary from the very vague (ethical is defined by the consumer) to the specific (the questioner is only concerned about certain categories of good, for example, fair-trade goods or organic goods)' (2001:4). They refer to areas of ethical concern taken from a list produced by Out of this World grocery shops: 'healthy eating, community development, fair trade, animal welfare and environmental sustainability' (2001:4-5). It is their view that ethical consumerism is an evolution

from earlier consumerism movements. The first wave focused on value for money and the second wave concentrated on product safety (2001:7). The third wave, ethical consumerism, Tallontire *et al* argue, has three main components: '(a) animal welfare; (b) the environment and (c) human rights/working conditions and fair trade'(2001:7). It is the latter that concerns me here. However, it is worth remembering that linking the two more visible parts of trade: production and consumption and seeking actions from the 'consumer side' that will have an impact on the 'production side' are not new ideas. The eighteenth century antislavery movement in Britain called for the boycotting by UK consumers of sugar produced with slave labour in the Caribbean (Gabriel and Lang, 1995).

Ethical consumerism can usefully be split into more specific concepts: ethical trade; fair trade; and ethical consumer movements, depending on different specific stages of evolution and political focus. We need to separate for instance, stages of campaigning for ethical trade from stages of implementing ethical trading initiatives to have a better understanding of what ethical consumerism implies.

Campaigning for ethical trade

There has been recent concern with labour rights and social justice on the part of the campaigners typically beginning with boycotts of particular commodities. High profile campaigns include those against the apartheid system in South Africa in the eighties and the beginning of the nineties (Barwa, 1998) and other consumer boycott campaigns such as against buying and consuming products from Shell and Nike (Klein, 2000) and Nestlé (babymilk, 2003). Such campaigns were seen as

synonymous with action in which an ethical statement was being made against the malpractice of a government or a company. However, NGOs, trade unions and other organisations became increasingly concerned about the immediate impact that boycotts have on the people they are supposed to benefit: the workers and others. Boycotting a company's subsidiaries might result in the Northern company moving production to new sites, such that the workers in the original company are left without jobs. Sometimes workers from the subsidiary company might be punished by the company in retaliation for an overseas boycott and the workers could find themselves confronting even worse conditions than before the boycott started (Brassel and Rangel, 2001). These consumer campaigns to boycott have since developed into a range of initiatives within the ethical consumerism movement.

During the 1980s some Northern and Southern NGOs such as Oxfam and the Fairtrade Foundation were engaged in promoting fair trade initiatives¹. Fair trading seeks less to boycott products produced 'unfairly' and more to endorse products produced 'fairly'. A notion of ethics guides both sets of decisions, but one is not to buy at all - the stick - whereas the other is to buy what is labelled 'fair' - the carrot. As valuable as these initiatives have been for the welfare of small, own-account producers in the South, the issue of poor wages and conditions under which many waged workers in the South were employed by Northern multinationals and their subsidiaries still remains. During the nineties several campaigns about labour conditions for workers in the South were carried out throughout Europe and North America; probably the most notable in Britain being the Christian Aid (CAID) Supermarket campaign, which started in 1996. In this campaign, CAID was not

advocating boycotts but seeking to put pressure on the supermarkets to 'clean up' their supply chains by demonstrating the purchasing power of consumers who cared about workers' rights. Consumers were asked to collect supermarket receipts, which were handed to CAID and allowed CAID to show the supermarkets the extent of the purchasing power of consumers who care about social issues.

Along with the receipt collection strategy, CAID also asked consumers to write to the supermarkets letting them know directly that they were aware of the labour conditions workers in the South were suffering to comply with the supply chains of the supermarket, and then to ask what specific measures the managerial system were taking to tackle the issues of labour rights. Cut flowers were one of the products used in the campaign to illustrate the characteristics of labour standards in the South (Christian Aid, 1996, 1997).

Another important campaign has been the Clean Clothes Campaign that originated in the Netherlands and was taken up in the UK by Oxfam and other organisations. The campaign resorted to highly publicised media exposures of working conditions in factories in the South. Northern organisations such as Women Working Worldwide also combined these denouncements with support for the organisational and advocacy work of local organisations (Hale, 1998). The Christian Aid supermarket campaign and the Clean Clothes Campaign were supported and endorsed by several other British NGOs, that had also jointly started to discuss alternatives to the boycotts, with the principle of endorsing products produced 'fairly'.

Another important aspect in the building up of the strategies was the proliferation of voluntary codes of conduct since the beginning of the 1990s, characterised by Jenkins, Pearson and Seyfang as ‘both a manifestation of and a response to the processes of globalisation’ (2002:1). They argue that:

The proliferation of such codes is indicative of a widespread retreat from state regulation of transnational corporations and a consequent emphasis on corporate self-regulation in a wide variety of important areas such as basic working conditions, environmental standards and human rights (Jenkins, Pearson and Seyfang, 2002:1).

By 1997 the idea of corporate accountability, brought to the fore by Christian Aid and the other NGOs working in the field of labour rights, was gaining ground with the supermarkets. Companies like Sainsbury’s, moved by the supermarket campaign and maybe fearing the possibilities of a boycott (like the one which Shell had suffered because of its operations in Nigeria), took the initiative to start negotiations with the UK-Trade Network, which comprises 45 British NGOs involved in international trade issues (Open Trading Initiative, 1997:1). The result of these negotiations was the setting up of a working group called the Monitoring and Verification Working Group (MVWG). The MVWG looked for alternatives and strategies which would go beyond the sole implementation of a code of conduct², which was proving to be nothing more than a public relations exercise for companies such as Gap and Levi’s (Klein, 2000). The campaigning stage ended when the MVWG developed into the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) that comprises not only NGOs and companies but also trade union representatives and the British government (See www.eti.org.uk).

The ethical trading initiatives

The idea behind ethical trading initiatives was of consumers campaigning to let the companies know that they could boycott them unless they took action to change working practices along the supply chain; and for the NGOs and other actors to monitor and to verify the developments of these changes. However, during the implementation of the ETI, the NGOs, by being part of the bureaucratic machinery set up, shifted their role from campaigning against the State and the companies to negotiating with them (Madrid, 1999). The main concerns of the ETI since its origins in 1998 have had to do with debates around the contents of a universal (base) code of conduct (Hughes, 2001), with processes of monitoring and verification of the implementation of a code of conduct, and with the implementation of pilot projects to test the viability of their mechanisms. The roles of the Southern NGOs and workers within the initiative have been pre-ordained by the participants of the ETI, Northern NGOs, Northern companies, Northern trade unions and the British Government. The Southern workers, Southern NGOs, and consumers that had campaigned for ethical trade were excluded from participating in the decision making processes involved in planning and designing the initiative (Madrid, 1999).

Up to the campaigning stage, the ethical consumerism movement in Britain was divided into the components mentioned before by Tallontire *et al*: animal welfare, the environment and fair trade and human rights/working conditions (2001:7). However, the setting up of the ETI has seen it appropriating debates and policy about working conditions and marginalising from these discussions ethical

consumers and the public in general who are not part of the ETI. This separation has been enforced by the mechanism set in place to implement the ethical trading initiatives: a top down concern with the implementation of codes of conducts followed by monitoring and verifying the implementation of the code. Consumers and workers, who are supposed to be the drivers and the reason for the initial campaigns, have not been participating in the planning and implementing of the ethical trading initiatives (Hughes, 2001; Madrid, 1999).

Academic analysis, such as that by Blowfield (1999) and Hughes (2001), mirrors this separation. In his discussion about ethical trade, Blowfield argues that ethical trade is *the response* of the retailers and manufacturers to ‘a mixture of consumer, media, employee, shareholder and general public pressure, together with a recognition of the importance of sustainable supply chains’ (1999:1). It is interesting that Blowfield does not include the NGOs, Southern or Northern, among the actors that have played a role in the building of ethical trading initiatives. His position reinforces the above mentioned separation with the insistence that ethical trade ‘today refers to the adoption of societally and environmentally responsible strategies within the value chain, the monitoring and verification of these strategies, and the reporting of societal and environmental performance to key stakeholders’ (1999:2). The term adoption, to take up or to take over, seems to refer to a static and inflexible set of social and environmental strategies that have been already designed, rather than a programme that engages several more actors in the chain such as consumers and workers. As we have seen, ethical trading initiatives have been the result in part of campaigns initiated, backed or supported by workers, trade unions and NGOs in

the South as well as in the North. However, the development of the initiatives has become a Northern monopoly.

Another top-down initiative that does not include consumers or workers is analysed by Hughes (2001). She works on global commodity networks, ethical trade and governmentality applied to the Kenyan cut flower industry, and focuses on the ethical trading initiative planned and implemented by the Kenyan Flower Council (KFC). Their ethical trading initiative is designed by the KFC directors who comprise both financial and production managers of major farms (Hughes, 2001:397). Hughes uses research that focuses on informants from the industry such as executive officers and production managers and consumers are only present in the text to give justification to the ethical trading initiative framework (*ibid*, 390). On the other hand, Hughes is aware of the marginalisation of the workers in the initiative: ‘albeit deeply influenced by the different concerns and demands of overseas buyers, campaigners and other ethical trading organisations, the majority of the workers appear to be constructed as passive subjects in the process’ (*ibid*, 398). However, she herself perpetuates this marginalisation by using the voices of the workers in the text only to testify that the KFC code of conduct has not delivered the changes it was set up to secure (*ibid*, 397).

Hughes’ global commodity networks analysis of ethical trading initiatives might not include the voices of the consumers or the producers because ethical trade, as understood by the dominant actors, does not include producers and consumers within its planning and implementation processes. Ethical trading initiatives instead

operate on behalf of both, assuming that the initiative knows the producers' needs and that it knows, or can influence, the consumers' preferences and choices, be they political or simply regarding colours and tastes. The KFC code of conduct has been planned and implemented in Kenya but Hughes argues that the initiative is influenced by the UK supermarkets and other external actors in the cut flower network, not including workers or consumers (2001:397-398).

Another example of ethical trading initiatives is the International Cut Flower Campaign, currently based in Germany. It was also originated following concerns and denouncements by NGOs, trade unions, academics and organisations from Colombia working with Northern organisations such as FIAN, *Terres des Hommes* and Bread for the World. However, in looking for mechanisms of social control over the operations of the cut flower companies, and given the political repression against trade union leaders, NGO activists and workers in Colombia, it gradually concentrated its operations in the North. Although the campaign is still NGO based, working together with international trade union organisations and other organisations, it has also concentrated its efforts on the discussion of the contents of an international code of conduct and later on its implementation.

Even though there was an effort to include consumers and workers (Brassel and Rangel, 2001), it is my contention that their participation has been limited more to following the roles already drawn for them by the campaign. So consumers are to continue pressing retailers to ask their suppliers to adopt the International Code of Conduct (ICC), workers and Southern NGOs are to report on violations of the ICC

by the companies working within the scheme and others are to press for the adoption of the ICC in the sector.

Hughes argues that the work on commodity chains has moved on from 'highlighting the barriers to consumer resistance resulting from the global trading power of multinational manufacturers and retailers' and that 'new studies are instead understanding the realm of consumption as a space for political action' (2001:392). She explains that authors such as O'Riordan (2000) have pointed out the vulnerability of retailers to NGOs and media campaigns when their retailer-supplier networks are identifiable and when their suppliers are found to operate with poor working conditions. These poor conditions can then be visibly associated with the retailers' brand names and it is there that their vulnerability lies (2001: 392). Hughes argues, quoting Klein (2000), that the groups campaigning for ethical trade have seized upon this susceptibility, and the supermarket campaign, the Stop the Sweatshops campaign and the Clean Clothes campaigns exemplify the activities of the campaigners.

In fact I could argue that the consumer power so celebrated has been co-opted to legitimise the ethical trading initiatives, including the ethical trading initiative in Britain that is composed by NGOs, trade unions, companies and the British government. There have been few engagements with the public and there has not been an act of permanent dialogue or negotiation with consumers or with workers in the North or the South. The assumption has been that there was the need for a one-off massive negotiation and/or consultation that resulted in a code of conduct that

would remain static over time. The ethical trading initiatives have resulted in a limited exchange of good will between retailers, companies, some Northern NGOs, some Southern NGOs, and some academics. The main forces behind the initiative, the consumers, and the main 'beneficiaries', the workers, have been marginalised once again.

However, the movement that set the ethical trading initiatives in motion still exists. NGOs campaigning on working conditions in export-related industries might have been reduced to a few non-mainstream NGOs, such as Banana Link, the World Development Movement or Women Working Worldwide, but the force that strengthened the NGO campaigns, the workers, continue to organise themselves within initiatives that respect their right to determine how to be part of their own societies.

Summary and conclusion

I have reviewed seven sets of literature in relation to my topic: the commodity chain concept, cut flowers in Colombia, the meanings of flowers, culture, consumption, the gift and the ethical consumerism movement. I have argued that the commodity chain analysis addresses aspects of production and consumption, although not always giving the same weight to both of them. The commodity chain literature I have reviewed tends to analyse production processes through 'material' conditions and consumption processes through 'cultural' aspects. This is accentuated through the geographical placement of the processes of production in the South and the

processes of consumption in the North by almost all the writers on commodity chains, which suggests that no transformation of meaning takes place in the South.

I have used the commodity chain characterisation by Leslie and Reimer (1999) who identify three main approaches: the global commodity chain (GCC) which emphasises the importance of looking at material factors in the production process; the commodity circuits (CC) approach that almost exclusively focuses on consumption and the systems of provision approach which looks for a 'vertical' analysis, highlighting aspects of consumption and aspects of production that are common across various commodities. An example of a system of provision could be the analysis of the common aspects in the production, consumption and international trade in 'fresh fruits' and 'fresh flowers'.

The literature on cut flower production in Colombia has built on the existing gender and export-oriented literature to analyse the terms on which women enter the cut flower sector and the type of employment that the sector offers. The research undertaken, in many cases to support the action of campaigns directed to the consumers, has focused mainly around health and labour issues and has privileged analysis of the material aspects of cut flower production. Although some of the research has been motivated by the campaigns in the North, the analysis of consumption is limited to material aspects such as value and quantity of exports and analysis of international trade. Other features, such as cultural aspects of cut flower consumption in the North, are absent. In contrast, the analysis of cut flower consumption from a Northern perspective, exemplified by Jack Goody, addresses

only cultural aspects of consumption and sidelines cut flower production in the South.

The use of the term 'culture' by the commodity chain theorists implies a hierarchisation associated with heterogeneity, agency and political awareness on the part of the consumers and homogeneity and 'victimisation' on the part of the producers. Cultural analysis focuses on consumption in the North with diverse meanings produced by agents, whereas material analysis focuses on production in the South and the crushing of workers by capitalism. The study of the word 'culture' by Williams (1990), however, points to the material origins of the word. It suggests a material culture in which there are no clear boundaries separating the cultural from the material.

The concept of consumption is not always associated with agency. Consumption is seen by Baudrillard (1998) as a result of alienating processes and also as a tool of alienation, whereby consumption is defined as a passive act. However, this view of people as passive consumers is contested by Radway (1995) who argues that the transfer of the metaphor of consumption to describe the social relationships between people and commodities in the act of purchasing objects, is a simplification of the complex social processes that the act involves. It is important to focus not only on the meanings of objects but also on the social relations that the objects sustain.

Cut flowers are 'cultural' in all senses but are often seen as 'natural'. Cut flower 'consumption' underpins a range of complex social relations, mainly found in the

giving of gifts. The gift literature analyses gift economy and gift exchange. I focus on the literature on the analysis of gift exchange and the social status, reciprocity and hierarchies that the exchange initiates, maintains or transforms. I reviewed the work of Davies (2000) and Vickery (1998) who use gift exchange to analyse gender and class relationships in sixteenth century France and eighteenth century England.

The ethical trade literature is of interest because ethical trade promotes the visibility of the social relationships between those engaged in production of commodities such as cut flowers and those engaged in their consumption. In theory, therefore, it links the two parts of the chain by asking consumers to take action that will lead to improvements in the living and working standards of the producers. The visibility of these social relations is necessary to strengthen the relationships and alliances between consumers and producers and to change the balance of power that allows for the conditions in which cut flowers are produced in the present.

However, I have argued that any action that privileges or focuses entirely on one part of the chain is problematic because it denies agency and autonomy to other parts. In practice the ethical trading initiatives seem to be privileging the consumption end, concentrating decision making processes on a few actors in the North. This is limiting not only worker participation but also consumers whose agency is co-opted by the key players: companies, NGOs and government.

With the exclusion of the main actors from the decision making processes, the room for political mobilisation is narrow. The ETI may be condemned to repeat the strategic errors of other top-down 'development' initiatives in the past.

I am concerned in this thesis with engaging with some of the assumptions made by the commodity chain theorists and the ethical trade activists. My specific research questions, including how they evolved during the research process, are considered in the next chapter. However, at this point I can outline the general terrain of my interest. Guiding me throughout has been a concern to resist designations of material aspects to production in the South and cultural aspects to consumption in the North. Thus, I have sought to analyse in detail what it means to work with flowers in Colombia, undertaking a cultural analysis of production. I am interested in the workers' ideas and perceptions about the labour process, the knowledge they have of their work and the values they attach to it. I am also concerned to locate production in the North by analysing, for example, the role of florists.

The scope for improving the conditions of cut flower workers is also a central concern and leads me in several directions. First the impact that ethical consumerism in the North is having on the labour processes in Colombia. Second, the transformation of cut flowers into gifts at the point of consumption and the effect this may have on initiatives to reveal the social relations of production. Third how ethical trading initiatives might better include workers and make use of their knowledge and strategies.

¹ Fair trade initiatives (from the North) aim to benefit small producers (of products which will not compete with the production of Northern products) in the South. The economic benefits are achieved through the elimination of commercial intermediaries and the creation of special niches in the northern markets. These niches are artificially created with the idea of helping by buying at 'fair' prices, which involves a higher payment for these goods than other goods which are produced under unknown social and environmental conditions (Oxfam, 1998, Fairtrade Foundation, 1998). With fair trade goods, consumers are not only buying goods but also supporting an ideology about the conditions under which the goods have to be produced (Madrid, 1999).

² Codes of conduct are private contracts between NGOs and companies, between trade unions and companies or established under the unilateral initiative of the company. By signing codes of conduct, companies are committing themselves to guaranteeing labour standards, not just in their own units of production but also in those of their suppliers down the sub-contracting chains. The precise labour standards that are guaranteed vary between codes and are constantly refined over time. In general, the codes commit companies to achieve through their own production, and crucially demand from their suppliers, labour standards regarding fair/decent wages, healthy working conditions, elimination of working risks, provision of signed contracts of labour, provision of resting time for food/water, elimination of child labour, and elimination/control of chemical substances used in the production of the products, for example pesticides.

The content of the codes depends mostly on the origin of the code and the bargaining power of the actors involved. To date, codes of conduct related to production, processing and trade have had three different origins: companies, NGOs, and trade unions. Company codes of conduct are subject to voluntary implementation and, in the majority of cases, designed by the companies without involving the workers and trade unions in the process (Hale, 1998).

Chapter 2: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter I will outline my initial research questions and their transformation according to the changes in the focus of my research. I will also address the type of research I have undertaken and the criteria I used to select my informants. The methodological problems I have encountered while preparing and carrying out the fieldwork, analysing and interpreting the material and writing up the thesis are highlighted. There is also a discussion of the feminist methodologies that inform my research, in which I explore my role in the processes of knowledge production and the ethics of research. As will become clear, my research interests do revolve around the literatures reviewed in the previous chapter but they are also very much bound up in personal experience.

The research process

My positioning within the field

My working experience and political involvement in Colombia since the early 1990s contributed to me considering cut flowers mostly as commodities. My work with Cactus, a Colombian Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), was within the cut flower sector, looking for alternatives to improve the labour conditions and living standards of the workers. Previous to that, in 1996, I also did a research for Christian Aid about the social, environmental and economic issues of cut flower cultivation in Colombia. Nearly 70% of the workers in the sector are women, and a high

percentage of these women are heads of families. The characteristics of the work offered by the cut flower sector vary but mostly the conditions are similar to those of the Free Trade Zones (FTZs) and Export Processing Zones (EPZs) around the world. These labour conditions are aggravated by the fact that in Colombia many of the organisations and trade unions working in the fields of human rights and social, cultural and economic rights are subject to threats, harassment and contract killing (see Human Rights Watch report 2002, Amnesty International report 2002). This results in little scope for social protests and the narrowing and closing of spaces in which to struggle for labour and social rights. My initial interest in the topic of fair/ethical trade was concerned with the search for alternatives that involved external and international actors in the struggle to improve the conditions of women workers in the particular sector of cut flower production.

Amidst the narrowing of spaces for democratic action in Colombia referred to above, three of the members of Cactus, including myself, had to leave the country in July 1997. We came to Britain to continue the work on codes of conduct and to find out more about the Northern NGO programmes here, such as the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI). From the South, the ETI looked like tackling, at least on paper, most of the problems faced by women workers.

However, once we were in Britain, I became increasingly aware, and concerned, that we as Southerners were not consulted in further discussions about the ethical consumerism initiatives, quality seals or codes of conduct. We were requested to give testimonies to the public about the appalling conditions of the workers and

other facts but not to give our views about how the whole process should proceed. We went to some ETI meetings where we saw Northern members of NGOs, Northern trade unionists and Northern companies discussing the situation of the workers in the South, but if they were interested in our comments it was only an interest in those that we gave through testimony. It was the same case in a meeting that I had with a member of Christian Aid and some Sainsbury's supermarket staff, who were part of the initiative. It looked as though our role as Southern NGO members was already designed and that we had to operate within the boundaries of this role.

Confronted with this situation, I started to question the whole process, thinking that if the roles for Southern actors were already designed, how did the discourse of participation fit in and how were the voices of women workers from the South going to be included within this Northern-made initiative? Were there again symptoms of imperialism within the institutions and Northern NGOs, which declared themselves to have been fighting imperialism around the world through their commitment to grass-roots development? My interest in examining the decision making processes in the ETI was pursued through my MA dissertation, where I tackled the gender divisions as well as the North-South separation/division at the heart of the ETI in Britain (Madrid, 1999). However, this raised as many questions as answers, and through the support of the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender I started my PhD and continued pursuing some of these questions, now more focused on the relationship between ethical consumerism and cut flowers.

Initial research questions and design

In the initial review of literature on cut flower production in Colombia, I identified a geographical as well as a theoretical separation of the processes of production and consumption of cut flowers. Production was located in the South and the analysis concentrated on the economics of production, the material relations. There was a tendency to analyse only the material conditions of the production processes in Colombia, paying little regard to aspects of consumption in the North or to the meanings of production. Meanwhile, the literature on consumption in the North concentrated on material conditions and cultural aspects of consumption but hardly linked them to production. In contrast, I came across the commodity chain concept which offered a very promising theoretical starting point because it analyses both processes, and in theory gives them equal importance.

In fact, closer inspection showed that dualism also informed commodity chain work. Nonetheless, it was commodity chain analysis that provided my initial research frame. This contemplated following a cut flower commodity chain from its site of production in Colombia to its site of consumption in the UK and I was planning to intervene at strategic points along the way. I intended to do a six month period of field work in the UK and then to spend another six months in Colombia. In the UK I planned to interview cut flower consumers, women workers, florists, supermarket workers and managers and owners of cut flower importer/packer companies. My aim was to explore the use of flowers in the lives of the informants and their knowledge about the conditions under which cut flowers are produced, as well as to get an

understanding of how the trade operates in the North. I did not want to confine myself to raising only cultural/consumption issues in the North.

In Colombia I was interested in talking to women workers, company owners, supervisors and managers of the *cultivos* as well as NGO and grass-roots organisation workers, florists and cut flower exporters. My aim was to know more about the informants' perceptions of consumers and cut flower consumption, the work that was needed to produce a flower and their perception of that work. I did not want to confine myself to a material analysis in the South. I was also seeking more information on the characteristics of the cut flower trade, answering some of the questions that the commodity chain framework debates were addressing in terms of whether it is a (corporate) producer driven or a (corporate) buyer driven chain. My research questions at this point were, therefore:

1. How are the meanings of production and consumption constructed and transmitted between the women workers in the cut flower industry in Colombia?
2. How are the conditions and meanings of cut flower production gendered?
3. If consumers are coming to 'know' about producers, what do producers 'know' about consumers?

4. How are the meanings of production and consumption constructed and transmitted between women workers in the cut flower industry in the UK?
5. What do women workers in the UK know about women workers in Colombia?
6. How do the material aspects of the production 'side' get obscured within the cut flowers transactions?
7. Is ethical consumerism affecting the gendered language and meanings of flower production and consumption?
8. What have been the responses in Colombia to the ethical consumerist campaigns?

Problems of realisation, processes of transformation

The research questions were trying to answer various issues posed by a commodity chain approach. However, through my continued involvement in campaign work I started to be in close contact with cut flower consumers for the first time. Cut flower consumers were everywhere around me, university lecturers, class mates, NGO workers and friends; and they had a very positive impression of flowers. Many of them knew about the conditions under which commodities such as coffee, tea, clothes, and bananas were produced and many of them were buying fair trade coffee or boycotting problematic commodities such as specific brands of jeans and shoes.

However, I noticed that they were buying, giving, receiving and displaying flowers without showing much awareness about the labour conditions which lay behind them. I initially thought that the lack of awareness might be related to a lack of information about the campaigns and I tried to fill this gap by sharing information about the working and living conditions of women workers in Colombia and asking people to take action about it. My activist hat was playing an important role and I prioritised denouncing the situation of the women workers in the cut flower industry in Colombia.

Thus, during the preparations for the UK-based fieldwork, meeting prospective informants and discussing their awareness about cut flowers with my supervisors, new research questions began to take shape and the awareness of the consumers came to be an important issue. There were also other factors that came into play during the research process to transform my research questions. Firstly, I have a variety of social and cultural capitals, and where these were recognised in the field they facilitated research but in some areas of the research field as originally planned they were not recognised or recognised as negative. Some of these effects are discussed on page 74 on negotiating access. There was thus unevenness in the quality of the research data that was generated and a decision was taken to focus on the areas of strength and to jettison questions that could not be answered. Secondly, the scope of the research was influenced by the exigencies and inevitable delays and failures in establishing contacts as time was advancing, such as in Sandy and in terms of my own health problems in Colombia discussed on page 79. This restricted the number of informant that I was able to access during my research period. The

third and most important reason for the transformation, however, was my commitment to allow the research design to be shaped by the actual research process and the response to the research subjects. This is much in line with the principles of grounded research.

As the field work progressed, three key research questions became clarified. The first was a development of the original research questions 1 and 2, drawing from the commodity chain analysis, but this was developed to incorporate the production of a clear account of the work process, including its organisation and how workers experienced it. Particular attention was paid to the extent to which the perception of cut flower cycles of production depended on the position of workers in the labour hierarchy. The second incorporated the original research question 6, and asked why the consumers, who were aware of the problems facing production of other commodities, such as coffee, were not aware of the problems facing cut flower production? Why has there been no successful cut flower campaign in the UK? This aspect took the research into questions that focused on the meanings of cut flowers and their social functions as gifts, reversing the original research question 7 and incorporating parts of question 6. Thus, is the gendered language and meaning of cut flower consumption affecting the scope for ethical consumerism around this commodity? The third major research question concerned the politics of intervention and the ethics of cut flower production and consumption and was built around the original question 8.

Transformed research questions

The following are the final research questions as they were transformed through the processes of field work and the exigencies of the research. The three analytical chapters (4, 5 and 6) address one set each.

- 1a. How is the work process organised in cut flower production in Colombia?
How is this organisation gendered? From what sectors of the population are workers recruited and how?
- 1b. How does the position of workers in the labour hierarchy structure their perception of the cycles of productions and how do these differ from those of management?
- 2a. Why were the Gaia consumers, who were aware of the problems facing production of other commodities, not aware of the problems facing cut flower production? Why has there been no successful cut flower campaign in the UK?
- 2b. How do cut flowers circulate as gifts and what meanings and social relations do they sustain? What impact do these have on the scope for ethical consumerism around cut flowers?
- 3a. How cut flower entrepreneurs responded to the campaigns in Colombia?

- 3b. What lessons can be drawn from this in terms of the prospects for ethical flowers?

Type and methods of research

The methods of research had to acknowledge the centrality of my informants to my research. Participatory Action Research (PAR) advocates argue that 'it might be necessary to make the people the subject, defining the process to be one of the people's own independent inquiry, in which the outsiders may be consulted at the initiative of the people' (Fals-Borda, 1991:17). This reverses the subject/object position of 'traditional' research systems. PAR is about 'doing research with and for the people, and not on them' (Fals-Borda, 1991:148). But for a number of reasons a formal PAR was not undertaken. The lead-in period for PAR would have been too long to be practicable when the research is being done in Colombia and I was also concerned with issues of security for both myself and the respondents. However, the research honours the aims of PAR regarding the centrality that the informant's ideas and views have in my thesis. I intend my work to be accessible, useful and understandable and for it to go back to my informants and to the people who contributed to it, and in this sense I am doing research with and for them. I am also aware that through this research, if successfully completed, I will obtain an academic title that will enhance my cultural capital. In spite of the fact that I will personally benefit from this research, I have been conscious throughout that this should not detract from the primary purpose, ethos and use of the research, which has been informed directly by PAR approaches. Although my research is not PAR in the

sense that it not designed, carried out and controlled by its own respondents, I can say that my research is action research in the way that I seek to contribute to social and political change for the women workers, which follows the path of past and present feminist theory and activism.

Feminism is a movement that seeks to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression (hooks, 2000:1) and in this sense I claim that my research is feminist research. According to Ramazanoğlu with Holland ‘there is no universal definition of what is or is not feminist, so any attribution to ‘feminist’ (or ‘not feminist’ or ‘not feminist enough’) rests on claim rather than facts’ (2002: 146). My claim that my research is feminist accords with their definition that: ‘research projects can be thought of as feminist if they are framed by feminist theory, and aim to produce knowledge that will be useful for effective transformation of gendered injustice and subordination (Ramazanoğlu with Holland, 2002:147).

As a feminist researcher I am aware of my subjective location in the research that influenced the processes of data collection as well as the analysis of the data. I am a former member of the Cactus collective and a Colombian who has been involved in different initiatives around the defence of human rights. This not only allowed me access to informants such as the women workers and the Gaia customers but also my work and my political involvement in Colombia and the UK informed the ideas that I brought to the systematisation and analysis of the primary and secondary material collected in my research.

Methods of research

Ethnographic methods of research acknowledge the centrality of the informants. Lareau and Shultz argue that ethnographic research involves the use of participant observation as well as in-depth interviews with key informants; there is an effort to understand the view of the participants, and researchers seek to be in the setting long enough to acquire some notion of acceptance and understanding (1996:3). The last aspect is key for Lareau and Schultz. When choosing what to include in their book *Journeys Through Ethnography* they point out that: 'the only works we would exclude from our definition are those using ethnographic methods (participant observation and in-depth interviews) but for such a short amount of time (e.g. one week per site) that a rich understanding of the setting could not possibly be obtained' (1996:3). This definition poses some questions regarding my presence in the field both in Colombia and in the UK that I will discuss later on.

In-depth interviewing or semi-structured interviewing, according to Bryman 'refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is able to vary the sequence of questions' (2001:110). I preferred semi-structured interviews because they include 'free interaction between the researcher and interviewee...Interview research typically includes opportunities for clarification and discussion. Open-ended interview research explores people's views of reality and allows the research to generate theory' (Reinharz, 1992:18).

Other methods of collecting information initially planned involved following press, magazine and TV representations on festivities such as Valentine's Day and Mother's Day in the UK and Colombia, and representations of workers in the press releases and web pages of the *Asocolflores* web page. My own participation in meetings, seminars and conferences on the ETI, the International Flower Campaign, grass-roots organisations and NGOs in Colombia was also a resource that I intended to include in my research.

The use of so many sources of information inevitably led me to consider the different uses of language employed by each of my informants, whose social, cultural and economic capital affected the way in which they each constructed their identity through the discourses they created and employed. The importance of language in self-identification is central to discourse analysis and I therefore chose to use it to analyse discourses deployed by the informants.

Discourse analysis

Burman and Parker argue that 'discourse analysis offers a social account of subjectivity by attending to the linguistic resources by which the sociopolitical realm is produced and reproduced' (1993:3). I am interested in the ways in which my informants made sense of their world and the discourses they deployed to legitimate their actions and to give those actions an internal logic and 'reasonableness'. In several cases the discourses used relied on sets of binary oppositions, whereby one side of the binary increased in value and the other side was constructed as inferior. So, for example, the *cultivo* owners and supervisors used the binaries culture: nature;

skilled: unskilled; modern: backward; rational: haphazard when portraying their vision of the sector and the ‘challenges’ of the workers. I am interested in the material and cultural practices that are associated with these discourses, such as low pay, surveillance, low status and lack of voice for the workers. I was aware during the development of my research that my informants were crucial to me being able to answer these questions.

The informants

Groups chosen and the rationale for their selection

I chose the different groups of informants based on their relationship to flower production and consumption and ethical trade. Belonging to a group does not imply that the group is homogeneous in its composition. The first group that I selected to work with, for instance, comprised consumers of a co-operative shop called Gaia in Leamington Spa, UK. Gaia advertises in its brochure its preference to sell non-meat, non-poisoning, organic, fair traded products, produced locally (Paxton and Huddleston for Gaia, 1998). The co-op sells mostly food products but they also have non-food products in stock such as detergents, soaps and gifts. Although Gaia do not stock flowers, I considered that the members of Gaia and its customers, as part of the ethical consumerism movement in the UK, could give me an indication both of their social and cultural relationship with flowers and whether or not this relationship has been affected by the flower campaigns. I was deliberately selecting a very particular set of consumers to work with, who were already motivated by fair trade and social justice ideals.

The second group I chose to work with were women working with cut flowers, in Colombia and in the UK. As discussed in the previous chapter, several academics and NGO research staff have undertaken research on the working conditions of women in cut flowers but this has centred on the material aspects of production and how these aspects have impacted on the women's work and lives. While acknowledging the political importance of this research, I also considered that other aspects and methods of research were missing such as feminist methods that allow women to express their ideas in their own words, about their lives, work and the society where they are living.

The Colombian workers are not a group that can be isolated from other groups such as the owners of the *cultivos* and the management (supervisors) that have influence over them, and which they in turn influence. I therefore sought interviews both with the owners and with the supervisors. I separate them because they occupy different social, economic and cultural spheres, not only in the plantation but in Colombian society, and have different relationships with the workers and with each other. The groups have different spheres from within which they exercise power or are affected by power relations.

Florists are both consumers and they work with flowers. They are in the special position of creating or recreating fashions and tendencies through negotiating, imposing or following 'taste' in relation to their customers. I was interested in finding out the extent to which they are aware of shifts in production and consumption, influenced by the campaigns.

I also chose to interview other groups that have relations with the workers, such as personnel from NGO and grass-roots organisations and government officials. People from these groups have been working with the workers for several years and I was interested in their perceptions of the trade and its effects on the workers, as well as their impact on the workers' lives, expectations and political movements. I also planned originally to interview cut flower workers in the UK, but had to abandon this as I could not get access as described below.

Negotiating access

I initially contacted the members of the Gaia collective and informed them about my research and my interest in contacting their customers to discuss issues around ethical trade and their perceptions of cut flower production. I interviewed some of the members of the collective and based on our discussions, they decided to put me in contact with some of their customers. I spoke to them and all of them agreed to meet me and to be interviewed.

I chose Sandy in Bedfordshire, where one cut flower importer/packer company is located, as the base for the interviews planned with UK cut flower workers. On my first visit I placed adverts in the post office and the newsagents of the town asking for interviewees. However, I did not have any reply. When I went back again I talked to one of the florists, who agreed to give me an interview and arranged for a second interview with another florist. Being black and a foreigner I felt like a total outsider in Sandy. It was difficult to engage in conversations with the locals, let

alone to identify where the workers would live or hang out. The only time I went into a pub everybody stopped their conversations and stared at me while I was having my drink.

I wrote letters to the priests and vicars of the towns around Sandy, asking them if they knew about workers who would be interested in talking to me about their work, but I did not have any reply from them either. I thought that they might know of, or be involved with, some of Christian Aid's local support groups and that they might have some knowledge of cut flower issues and be in contact with trade unions or other workers' political initiatives. I also tried to contact the local trade unions but they referred me from Sandy to Bedford. I was finally told that they did have a lot of interest in the issue, but they were not sure who would be in charge of this particular area.

One of the flower shop owners in Sandy gave me the contact of a packer/distributor company near Sandy, I phoned the manager and he asked me to send a letter with information about my research. I waited for some time and tried again only to be told that the employee in charge was not in or unavailable. After some time, he agreed to have a meeting but I was already on my way to Colombia. I also tried a second company I found on the internet. I sent a letter to the owner and he replied to me, some months later, saying he would be pleased to meet me and talk, but by the time I got the letter I was already in Colombia. Thus my attempts in Sandy were unsuccessful. Later on in

Colombia, however, I met a woman who had been working in a cut flower packing company and she agreed to talk to me.

I had planned to access women workers in Colombia through links with Colombian NGOs, worker organisations and church organisations, as well as the personal contacts with women workers I had built up during my work with Cactus. However, in doing fieldwork one must take into account the characteristics of the work that women do and the social, political and economic system of the places, regions and countries where women work and live. The cut flower industry in Colombia and world-wide is an export-oriented industry, whose economic interests are promoted and protected by the Colombian government and trans-national companies. One of their reactions against the increasing awareness of consumers in the North, has been to prevent communication between workers and researchers, be they from the press, academy or government. As we are going to see in chapter 6, companies try to prevent workers from contacting organisers and researchers through threats of job dismissal and harassment. To prevent the dissemination of information that will feed the campaigns, the cut flower companies have tightened even further the control over the work and lives of the workers.

Women workers challenge this control and manage to continue organising themselves in spite of the intimidation campaign carried out by the companies. Most of the time women workers need to maintain careful control over who is attending their meetings and to be careful about the visibility of their activities.

Therefore, I needed to assess the feasibility of my research methods such that I would not put their work in danger. Organising public meetings and workshops with the workers, asking questions of unknown people and going to the greenhouses without any insider contacts were not options in this case.

Contrary to the expectations of the companies that intimidating women workers would keep them away from ‘outsiders’, most of the women workers I had met previously and contacted again were willing to talk to me and discuss the possible content of an interview. I planned to have in-depth interviews with seven women workers from the different regions of cut flower production. Time constraints caused by an illness that I had in the middle of my fieldwork made me miss the opportunity of interviewing two women workers, who subsequently moved to another region. Other difficulties I faced were related to the time that the workers could devote to discuss the interviews and to the interviews themselves. As we are going to see in chapter 4, women workers work six days a week, from the early hours of the morning to mid-afternoon, but during peak times, such as Christmas and Valentine’s Day, these times could be extended late into the night. I had planned to carry out the interviews with the women workers during the period September – November so as not to interfere with their working hours, but my illness meant that by the time I was able to arrange meetings, we were passing through the peak season work for Valentine’s Day and pressure of work meant that sometimes we needed to arrange more than two meetings some weeks apart.

One of the dilemmas that I had before, during and after the field work was my own visibility in Colombia as an ex-Cactus collective member. There are only a handful of organisations working in the cut flower sector and the sector has been polarised between the ones who are on the side of the companies and *Asocolflores* and the ones who are against them. My role had changed from being a researcher in a Colombian NGO to that of an academic researcher from a university in England, but in substance I had been a member of Cactus and Cactus, at least until 1997, had been a radical organisation in the cut flower sector in Colombia. I was aware that as a researcher I could not hide these facts from the people in the companies whom I was going to interview.

The cut flower industry owners and managers in Colombia are a tightly knit group, who, as stated by one of the informants, ‘admire each other’s plantations but distrust each other; you don’t have friends in flowers’ (William). Strategically, I needed to get access to the company workers and management before I started interviewing the women workers; so while I was arranging interviews with the women workers, I tried to start accessing informants from the companies. I started by phoning florist companies that I knew also had plantations and therefore could have a view of the complete chain from production to consumption. I did not get any direct responses from the personnel in the companies; most of the time I would be told that the person with whom I needed to talk was not available at the moment but that I could try next week and they would pass him/her the message. Next time these intermediaries would ask me to go to their office and show them some letters

from the university and a CV, saying that they would pass the documents to her/him. In the next phone call they would tell me that the person had gone on holiday and finally somebody would leave a message for me saying that it would be better to contact *Asocolflores* because all the information was centralised there. None of the contacts I tried to make in this way worked out and therefore I needed to resort to personal connections, and so contacted a friend from university, who studied Agricultural Management, and was very likely to have worked in flowers.

One of my dilemmas was when and how to disclose the fact that I had worked with Cactus, and how far I should disclose the fact that I still maintained close links with other people and organisations working in the sector. In the end, a combination of stress, fear and anxiety at having to confront *Asocolflores* and the company owners and management, mixed with high altitude (Bogotá is 2600 metres above sea level) caused me to suffer several high blood pressure episodes that made me stop my field work for three months. However, during this time I went to several activities organised by grass-roots organisations.

When I felt better I got in contact with my university friend again, although not without some difficulty. She told me that she had not worked with flowers but that she had worked training horses for a woman who owned a cut flower company. She put me in contact with the owner of the *cultivo*, only after I had reassured her that I was not going to do something inappropriate that could jeopardise her future opportunities of work.

I phoned the company owner and she asked me to send her the questionnaire by e-mail. I sent it and waited for some days and phoned her again, to be told that the e-mail had had some technical problems and to try again. We discussed some of the questions by phone and she pointed out that she herself had done several pieces of research and that she had a Masters Degree. She insisted that I contact *Asocolflores* to discuss the questions with them. I agreed to contact *Asocolflores*, but with the condition that she would also give me an interview. She agreed, and gave me the details of the contact at *Asocolflores* and the process of 'clearance' with them began.

I had postponed the inevitable meeting with *Asocolflores* because, as I said before, it represents for me many negative memories, both personally and professionally. It is the institution that labelled our work in Cactus as going against the interests of Colombia, as being unpatriotic. In the middle of a civil war such as in Colombia, to signal somebody as a traitor to the interests of the country means that this person or organisation could easily become the object of intimidation and harassment by state security forces, using the façade of the paramilitaries.

Therefore, since the beginning of my fieldwork the inevitability of going back to *Asocolflores* had made me feel very uneasy. It was not only to do with their political responsibility for Cactus' lack of safety and that of the workers, but it was also an issue of class and 'race', manifested by the symbolic and material

power exercised by those people who own the farms and are members of *Asocolflores*.

Colombian society is deeply divided along class lines. The upper classes, who tend to identify themselves as white, westernised and 'educated', and often have the best access to resources tend to despise the values and characteristics of the other classes. The middle-classes are likely to identify with the values of the upper classes. People from working class and popular backgrounds tend to be *mestizos*, not only 'racially' but also culturally, having a strong cultural and social legacy from indigenous and black African as well as European communities. The cut flower society mirrors the general class, 'race' and gender divisions of the Colombian society. The *Asocolflores* members, the owners of the *cultivos*, tend to belong to the upper classes and the *Asocolflores* staff belong to a professional middle-class background that fiercely guards the interest of the owners of the farms. The workers tend to come from a popular and working class background; mostly originating from rural areas, having migrated to urban areas where they are located on the social and economic frontier of the cities (Salazar *et al*, 1995).

After several telephone calls and conversations by request of the company owner, the *Asocolflores* employee in charge of social issues agreed to meet me, after her holiday, and on condition that I sent her the questionnaire beforehand. When we finally met she did not allow me to tape the interview, refused to answer several questions and started asking questions about me and my

research. The *Asocolflores* offices are located in one of the most exclusive places in Bogotá. The building was designed for offices and is made of concrete, with smoked glass windows, views of a park, a quiet road and a garden. The entrance has been designed to symbolise power. To show its international connections, there is a multilingual atmosphere in the reception area – welcomes are given in several languages. This is difficult to reconcile with the environment a street down in the *carrera once*, where women, men and children struggle at the traffic lights to sell ‘special priced’ avocados and Marlboro cigarettes. Between the two environments there are several security guards.

My informant from *Asocolflores* had done some investigation on me, and at some point in the interview she got up and left to come back with the legal advisor, who sat with me in the room and asked me more questions about England, university life, and why I was doing the research. I stressed my interest in the cultural meanings of flowers, said that this topic had been little researched and that it was important to know more about these cultural aspects. I asked her some questions, without recording the answers. Finally the first employee reappeared, and after a few more questions she finished the interview, saying that she was bored and did not have more time. The *Asocolflores* employees ‘granted me permission’ to talk to the company owner and when I telephoned her again she was very friendly and invited me to go to her farm.

It is important to note again that neither the *cultivo* owner, nor the *Asocolflores* employees, allowed me to tape the interviews and therefore I used the notes I took

during the interviews and my fieldwork diary for the writing up of their ideas and comments.

The other company owner interviewed owns a small plantation and even though he is affiliated to *Asocolflores*, he only has a distant relation with the association. I also got access through a friend who has known him for several years and he checked on my progress about the meeting with *Asocolflores* before he decided to give an interview. My friend introduced me to him as ‘the woman who is doing research here to prove that all the women workers in the cut flower sector are exploited’. After this introduction it took me a lot of time and several patient telephone calls just to convince him to talk to me and to allow me to explain to him what the research was about.

To have access to the supervisors, I did not have to pass through *Asocolflores*, curiously, but through a complicated network of friends and friends of friends who have a relative who in turn met somebody who worked as a supervisor in a cut flower plantation. The florists in the small and medium shops were more accessible. I telephoned the first flower shop at random in Bogotá and although the owner did not turn up to the first expected appointment, I was able to arrange subsequent meetings and we carried on lengthy conversations. I contacted the second florist in his shop in Cartagena and he agreed to set a date for the interview the next day. As for the third, in another region in Colombia, she also agreed to talk to me without major problems. An internet entrepreneur in Bogotá also agreed straight away to meet for the interview. I also interviewed

a government official whom I had met before. She had been working in the cut flower production zone for several years.

Sample obtained

My field work lasted for almost a year. Initially I spent six months in the UK and then I travelled to Colombia, but my illness for some months modified the length of time that I had originally planned to spend there from six months to four.

Earlier in the chapter, I referred to Lareau and Shultz's definition of 'authentic' ethnographic research, that involves not only the use of participant observation as well as in-depth interviews with key informants, but also researchers being in the setting long enough to acquire some notion of acceptance and understanding (1996:3). In my case it is difficult to frame the total time I have been doing this research because of my different involvements as academic and activist researcher. Therefore, Lareau and Shultz's requirements raise some questions about my ethnographic credentials. Is there a 'right' measure of time to acquire some knowledge and understanding of the settings? Apart from pointing out that one setting might be different from another and therefore with different characteristics, researchers are also different from each other and their identities might play an important role in getting access to and acquiring an understanding of the settings. Questions also surround researchers who are in position similar to mine, closely involved with their 'subject' of research on and off for years, even if their 'official' fieldwork is quite short. Would my research still be considered ethnographic, or would it be considered that I am only using ethnographic methods of research?

Whatever its status, my fieldwork consisted of in-depth interviews with 33 informants from the UK and Colombia but I only used the data gathered with 29 of them. The interviews were also intertwined with activities, research and social gatherings that I shared in the UK and in Colombia with some of the informants.

The informants' profile

The Gaia informants total seven, four women and three men, in the age range of thirty to fifty years old. Virginia is 45 years old, from England and married to Mitch who is also English and 48 years old. Ash is English, 33 years old and single. Hazel is 50 years old and in the past she had a relationship with Michael who is 52 years old. Heather, who is married and 47 years old and Holly, who is 37 years old and single, were born in South Africa and the Netherlands respectively and they moved to England several years ago. The majority have a university education and they are now employed in professional jobs such as an academic researcher, freelance consultant and psychotherapist. They live in the Coventry – Leamington Spa area in the West Midlands.

Some of the informants have also worked as volunteer campaigners for charities, such as the Supermarket Campaign by Christian Aid and Fair Trade campaigns by Oxfam. Many are members of the Green Party, and/or consumer organisations, read the Ethical Trading Magazine, participate in the annual Peace Festival in Leamington Spa and are members of the Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) scheme. They have participated in diverse marches and political forums ranging

from support for ending the Israeli occupation in Palestine to campaigns against genetically modified food. In one form or another, almost every one of them has been involved in political activities around environmental and ethical consumerism movements. The recruitment via Gaia, therefore, gave me the profile of respondents I sought.

I interviewed five women working in the cut flower industry in Colombia who identified themselves as cut flower workers: *floristas* in Spanish. They originally came from different regions in Colombia: three from different places in the Andean mountains, and the other two from the western region of El Valle and Nariño. All of them come from the rural areas and four of the women workers used to work in agricultural tasks in their region of origin, such as planting and harvesting coffee and raising and looking after cattle, as well as domestic work. The women's ages at the time of the interviews were between 27 and 60 years. I will introduce each in turn.

Azalea is sixty years old, a *mestiza* (mixed -'race') widow, with six grown up children. She has primary school education and has also attended courses on small-enterprise management, cooking and dress-making at the community centre. She has worked in several cut flower companies since the beginning of the 1970s and although she has not been actively involved in the trade union movement, she supports these and other efforts of the workers to organise themselves through preparing meals for the gatherings and hosting meetings at her house. She has her own house and rents part of it to supplement her income.

Margarita is 40 years old, married, has two children, and has also taken courses in accountancy. She has been working on and off in cut flowers since the early 1990s. Although she is member of the workers' union, she says that she does not have time to be actively involved in the meetings and actions. She owns her own house and lives with her children; her husband has separated from her at various times and was just coming back to live with them again at the time of the interview.

Rosa has three children and is 45 years old. She has a secondary school education and in addition she has taken courses on co-operatives, dress-making and confectionary. She has been working with flowers since the 1970s and has been engaged in trade union activism for more than two decades; she also supports other activities and organisational efforts of the workers and has funded, with three other women workers, a confectionary co-op where they work during the weekends. She built her own house through a solidarity co-op scheme and lives there with her children and husband, although from time to time her husband has left, only to return later.

The other two women are in long term heterosexual relationships. Amaranta does not have children and her male partner has moved recently to the house that she built and owns. She has a primary education and has also attended further education courses on community work and organisations and carpentry. She started working in the sector in the second half of the 1980s. She has been

actively involved in trade union organisation but left the movement and is now working with other workers' initiatives in partnership with the unions.

Violeta is 27 years old, and has three children. She lives with her male partner in his extended family's home. She has a secondary education and has trained as a community health advisor, but had to stop because she moved to another place looking for work. Apart from her work in flowers, she does freelance work at night and at the weekends as a cosmetic and perfume seller from a catalogue that she distributes in the town where she lives. She wants to save money to build her own house and participates in weekly chain saving schemes. She has been working on and off in the sector for seven years and has worked with the trade union movement in the plantations, but the union in her company has been dismantled.

All five women were moving from place to place continuously until they came to live in the *barrios* around the urban areas of municipalities whose economic activity is dominated by cut flowers. Four of the women workers, in their thirties to their sixties, own their own house, while the fifth woman, younger, lives with her husband's extended family. They have been working in the cut flower sector for between 9 and 30 years, not all in the same place. Before coming to work in the sector the women from the group have worked in factories, domestic employment, agricultural work, been self-employed in restaurants and bars, and done home-working in handicrafts. Four of the women from the group have taken an active part in forming unions or other kinds of

organising initiatives in and out of the flower sector, or have been members of unions. They are thus perhaps not ‘typical’ workers; given my access routes and the general fear of speaking out about conditions in the sector, it is not surprising that my informants are politically active around labour rights. They did not express allegiance to any particular political party or movement. Regarding religion, three of them said that they were working within the Christian workers’ movement.

In Colombia, I interviewed a woman in her 20s, Daisy, from England, who had been working in a flower importing/packing company in Lincolnshire. She had worked there temporarily during her university vacation and had left to travel to Europe and then to Colombia where she was studying for a post-graduate degree.

I interviewed two company owners, one man and one woman. Lucie is about 50 years old, white, and married with two children. She has a post-graduate education. She has been growing flowers for more than twenty years and her family owns the land where the plantations are located. William is also 50 years old and not married, but in a heterosexual relationship. He comes from Antioquia in the west region of Colombia, he has a university education and also owns his own land.

I interviewed two men who have been working as supervisors in the *cultivos*. Narciso is approximately 35 years old, mixed-‘race’, with a university education

at a technological level. Divorced with two children, he comes from the Boyacá region in the Andes and has been working in the sector for more than 10 years.

Jacinto is 37 years old, mixed -‘race’ and trained initially as a vet. He is in his second marriage and has three children. He comes from Antioquia and has been working in the sector for more than 10 years.

Through e-mail I was able to interview Begonia, who works in the management office of one of the *cultivos*. She did not give me a lot of information about herself and I did not have the chance to ask her further questions or to meet her. She told me that she has university education and her loyalties were obviously with her bosses. I also interviewed the owners of two small florist shops, Iris and Rosemary in the UK and three, Petunia, Lilia and Floro in Colombia.

I interviewed three NGO workers in Colombia: Yasmin who is 27 years old, Magnolia who is 30 and Rosa Maria who is in her early 40s. In *Asocolflores* I talked to two employees Marta: who is approximately 50 years old and Cristina who is in her early 30s. Both have university degrees and believe that they are doing *patria* (building a nation) with their jobs in *Asocolflores*.

I had access to a government official, Dalia, who has been working in the cut flower production municipalities in Colombia for more than 20 years. She is a lawyer, working as a judge in family issues. She is a widow and has three children.

Researcher/Informant relations

As a researcher, I was in varying power relations with the individuals who form the groups that I researched. Feminist theorists stress the need to be ‘out’ about our identities and to acknowledge the impossibility of objective knowledge. In my negotiations with the ethical consumers and later on in Colombia with *Asocolflores*, my identities played crucial roles in opening or constraining my access to informants. Clearly my respondents were checking me out as much as I was checking them!

In the case of the Gaia customers, I identified with some of their ideas about ethical production and consumption, green politics and social justice. However, through the research I realised that although my informants were very concerned about ethical trade, it was only one part of a holistic lifestyle for them that also included being vegetarian, vegan sometimes, and to favour organically, locally produced food and goods. I am not vegetarian, I eat meat and wear some leather products such as shoes and jackets, I use public transport and a bicycle but also drive a car, shop in supermarkets (because it is cheaper for me as a student) and buy products that have been flown from thousands of kilometres away. Throughout the research it was clear that some of my informants had made assumptions about my politics of consumption, for example that I was vegetarian and a consumer of organic products (maybe because I knew about them), and these assumed alliances made me feel uneasy and sometimes not ‘legitimate’ as a feminist researcher and as an activist.

As the interviewing proceeded with the ethical consumer group, I began to discuss my consumption patterns with some of the informants. Indeed one of them asked me directly and when I clarified that I was not vegetarian I could see that she was shocked. She had assumed I was a vegetarian based on our discussions about ethical consumerism and flower politics. Her attitude towards me changed and for some minutes she tried to engage me more on the topics of vegetarianism and organic food than to move onto other issues regarding cut flower consumption. However, when I acknowledged my meat-eating to another informant, he commented that he ate chicken nuggets and fish every now and then, and another one told me he sometimes ate fish.

Another example of the instability of power relations between interviewer and interviewees arose when a Gaia-recruited informant did not agree with my methods of interviewing and considered she was in a position to 'correct' me. As I mentioned before, I privileged the use of semi-structured interviews which allowed me to change the order of the questions or to expand on a particular issue of interest. In this interview, my informant, who had done academic research, interrupted one of my questions saying she had noticed that I was not following the order of the questions I had in my hand and that given her experience as a researcher this was thus not a 'real' interview!

My identities as a former Cactus employee and a black/*mestiza* Colombian hindered my access to plantation owners and supervisors and *Asocolflores* staff.

When I arrived at the farm of one company owner, I was told by her that I could

not tape the interview but only take notes. I took notes about the *cultivo* and some of the stories she was telling me as well as some of the conversations I had with workers during the visit. I could not follow the set of questions as I had done with other informants because we were constantly moving around the farm and also because she was bringing up different subjects at the same time. Similarly at *Asocolflores*, my interviewees definitely had the upper-hand in terms of power relations; they dictated the length of the interview and the questions they were willing, or not, to answer. On the other hand my identities facilitated my access to women *cultivo* workers, albeit those with a history in labour organisation as already noted.

Language and translation

The issues of language in transcribing the UK interviews were painful. Once my informants relaxed they would talk fast, use slang, lower their voices, and sometimes walk around the room pouring cups of teas while they continued talking. I needed to resort to my notes on the interviews and to double check with native English speakers the accuracy of my transcribing. However, I found out that while I was transcribing, slowly, I was already coding the interviews according to the different themes such as uses of flowers and uses of ethical trade gifting.

The issue of language was also relevant in the interviews I did in Colombia. I did them in Spanish and when I came back to the UK I started transcribing the interviews and simultaneously translating them. However, I found out that I could not code them easily and that they did not make very much sense once I had

translated them. Therefore I decided to stop the translation, continue transcribing in Spanish and start the analysis in Spanish, only then to translate the text and quotations into English. One of my main concerns in this thesis is to privilege the voices of the informants, and the women workers' in particular, and I needed to be very careful about finding the words and phrases in English that I thought would reflect the meanings they were giving to their words. It proved very difficult in practice and since I had financial constraints, I resorted to native English speaking friends who had done translation before and who also knew about the work of the organisations, the women workers' work and lives and the cut flower sector in Colombia in general. I need still to acknowledge that the richness of the language my informants used, their sense of humour and their awareness is not by any means all reflected in these translations and I apologize for that.

Ethics

There are several issues related to confidentiality regarding the informants and my own perception of their position in the cut flower sector. I have used pseudonyms for all the cut flower workers, the NGO workers, the supervisors and one of the company owners. As I explained before, cut flower workers are at risk not only of losing their jobs or being banned from work in the farms, but also of suffering from other kinds of retaliation. NGO workers working on human rights have been threatened, harassed and killed, and the anonymity of their contribution to this thesis is a way of ensuring that they can continue working within the sector. If supervisors are identified, they risk losing their jobs because of issues of trust and unconditional

commitment to their company. One of the owners also manifested his willingness to remain anonymous.

The cut flower sector in Colombia is a closed and small world; therefore to ensure the anonymity of my informants I have changed not only their names but some other information about their profiles, although keeping it within an accurate range of their class, activities, education or place of origin.

Other informants, such as the *cultivo* owner, Lucie, and the *Asocolflores* staff did not bring up the issue of anonymity. In the case of the *Asocolflores* staff, they made no separation between their personal views and those from the Association. Within the group of ethical consumers in England, two of them enquired about the possibility of remaining anonymous and I decided that it would be appropriate then to ensure the anonymity of all of them.

Summary and conclusion

In this chapter I have described the transformations that my initial research questions underwent and the reasons behind these transformations. Access to informants and the assessing of the material gathered in the light of the literature reviewed shaped the research questions. The context in which I was doing the fieldwork influenced my choice of methods of research. I chose to apply semi-structured interviews that allowed the flexibility to extend the length and form of the base-questions, taking into account time and mobility constraints. These were especially acute for the Colombian fieldwork, given that production for Valentine's Day was at its peak. The

needs of workers, supervisors and *cultivo* owners included anonymity, which would have not been possible if I had pursued my initial idea of having workshops. I complemented primary data collection with attendance at seminars, conferences and press conferences concerned with cut flowers, human rights and ethical trade. Another important source of material has been the internet, where I have found articles and documents used both by the campaigns and by the industry to promote their views. These articles and documents are published all around the world and the use of the Internet has facilitated my access to them.

Access to the different groups of informants was mediated by the recognition or not of my own social and cultural capital and the secretive nature of the cut flower industry owners. Indeed, since I undertook my fieldwork in the cut flower sector, it seems to have closed access to researchers altogether. A recent researcher, who shall remain anonymous, recalls her Colombian contacts being surprised that previously friendly industry members had ceased conversations with outsiders. Her contacts insisted that this represented a recent change in policy in the sector.

The characteristics of the sample obtained reflect particular groups of informants. The Gaia group comprises consumers with a degree of awareness about ethical consumption issues and different relations to the use of and knowledge about cut flowers. The women workers in Colombia all share the know-how or practical knowledge of cut flower production but they also have a degree of reflexivity about the industry that has resulted from their involvement

as activists and trade unionists. *Cultivo* owners, *Asocolflores* employees and to a certain extent supervisors, share the protection of the interest of the industry as a whole, in spite of their differing socioeconomic backgrounds.

Power relations determined access to informants but also determined my interaction with my informants during the interview processes. I was occupying different identities during the research processes, including being Colombian, a university student, an activist and in some cases identities were assumed by the informants, such as my being vegetarian. *Asocolflores* staff and company owners wanted to show ‘their side of the story’ to me. They were in control of the ways that I could collect the information: I was not allowed to tape record the interviews; the date and location of the interviews was on their terms (in their offices, homes or *cultivos*); the length of the interviews was governed by them and I had to send my questions in advance. They went to great lengths to ensure control over the messages they were giving me about the *Florverde* programme and the *Cultivemos* programme to which I refer in Chapter 6, seeking the opportunity to channel this information through me.

The next chapter of the thesis provides the context for the analysis to follow, detailing the background and characteristics of cut flower cultivation in Colombia, the ways in which it is perceived, and recent developments. It also assesses the market for cut flowers in the UK and the recent rise to prominence of the supermarkets as cut flower retailers.

Chapter 3: FRAMING THE SECTOR

Introduction

Cut flower production in Colombia has been defined as a success story by authors such as Farné (1998), Meier (1999) and Van Wijk (1994). However, it is important to understand the historical, social, economic, geographical and cultural conditions that have allowed for the development of the industry in Colombia. The first part of this chapter gives an overview of the importance of the trade at international level and the position that Colombian flowers occupy in it. Then it focuses on the factors that shaped the socioeconomic characteristics of the Colombian society of the 1960s and allowed for the successful advent of cut flower cultivation and its expansion in the 1980s. Through the work of the authors mentioned above, I will address the question of how successful cut flower cultivation has been for the ‘development’ of Colombia.

In the second part of the chapter I will analyse the changes in cut flower trading structures in the UK, paying particular attention to the increasing role of the supermarkets. The supermarkets are of importance firstly, because of their increasing role in cut flower retailing in the UK and secondly, because of their strategy of cutting out intermediaries, allowing them to have direct contact with the cut flower producer companies in the South. This direct contact is of strategic importance for the campaigns, as the supermarkets hold the key to exert pressure over their cut flower supply chain. Another aspect considered is the changes in the

types of cut flowers that the British public consume and the extent to which these changes are due to the afore-mentioned changes in the trade structure.

International context

Cut flowers are big business internationally with a vast potential for expansion. The value of total imports in the international cut flower trade for the year 2000 was US\$ 3.7 billion. The main importing markets were the USA (US\$ 770 million); Germany (US\$ 714 million); the UK (US\$533 million); the Netherlands (US\$ 368 million) and Japan (US\$ 166 million) (Pathfast Publishing, 2001). The value of cut flower and plant sales for the UK was estimated in 1999 to be around GB£4 billion (FlowerTech, 1999) which shows the size of the value added to the retailing side of the trade. Sales of cut flowers in Europe were expected to reach EU€ 12 billion by the year 2000 (FlowerTech, 1999).

Sources such as *Asocolflores* (no date), the International Labour Office (ILO) (2000) and FlowerTech (2000) argue that Colombia occupies the second place in exports in the international trade in cut flowers, sharing between 10 and 14 % of the world market, after the Netherlands that controls 56%. The value of Colombian cut flower exports was US\$583 million in the year 2000 (Mincomex, 2003). Other leading producer countries are Israel 4.2 %, Kenya 2.7%, Ecuador 2.7%, Italy 2.1% and Thailand 2.1% (ILO, 2000). In terms of trade, the main destination for Colombian flowers is the United States of America as we can see in table 3.1 on the next page.

According to *Asocolflores*, in 2000 the UK purchased flowers worth US\$27.9 million from Colombia which represents 4.8% of Colombia’s total output and 48.9% of the total exported to the EU (*Asocolflores*, 2003).

In 2001 nearly 85% of the total flower exports were directed to the USA, increasing Colombia’s commercial dependency on this market from 78.7% in 1992. Exports to the European Union have decreased from 16.4% of the total in 1992 to less than 10% in 2000 (*Asocolflores*, 2003). The United Kingdom remains the EU’s main buyer of Colombian flowers, the value of cut flower exports to the UK in 2002 being US\$27 million compared with US\$21 million in 1991 (Mincomex, 2003).

Table No. 3.1
Colombian Flower Exports (per country of destination 2000 – 2002)

Figures in thousand US dollars			
	2000	2001	2002
(Period)			
Total Exports	583,610	610,319	672,556
USA + (Puerto Rico)	479,179	486,718	550,499
Canada	12,356	13,764	17,898
European Union	57,493	61,388	62,506
Others Western Europe	848	1,214	1,409
Ex-CAME (Concejo de Ayuda Mutua Económica)	9,652	13,186	15,303
Of the total Colombian exports to the EU:			
United Kingdom	28,337	30,066	27,921
Germany	5,615	5,488	6,933
Holland	6,669	8,103	11,080
Spain	9,085	10,329	10,219

Source: Colombian Ministry of Foreign Trade (www.mincomex.gov.co)
Data at 19th February 2003

3.1 A brief history of cut flower cultivation in Colombia.

Colombian context

The Latin American countries of today share a history of conquest and colonisation by the Spanish and Portuguese, which started in 1492 with the arrival of Columbus and ended formally in 1830. Before the conquest, many ancient civilisations existed in Latin America, among the most well known being the Aztecs and the Mayans in Central America and the *Incas* in Peru. Colombia's main indigenous group were the *Chibchas*. Class inequalities combined with gender inequalities were present prior to the Spanish and Portuguese conquest, and served to overburden and exploit indigenous women. However, the conquest by Spain and Portugal brought a new discrimination based on 'race', but still permeated by class and gender. The colonial structures and institutions imposed by Spain and Portugal in the Americas encountered resistance from *mestizo*, Indigenous and African women and men, who sought to oppose the norms and values of the colonisers. The discontent of the American population with the heavy burden of labour and taxes imposed by the Spanish crown, and the lack of autonomy for the majority of the population, led to several independence movements throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Navarro and Sanchez, 1999).

The first country to gain independence was Haiti in 1803 and the last countries were those which were known as the *Gran Colombia* (Venezuela, Ecuador and Colombia) between 1819 and 1830. However, after independence, law, religion, education and social values in general continued to be based on the former Spanish institutions and

this is still the case today for most of the Latin American countries. After independence, the differentiation of the *mestizo* population in terms of 'whiteness' became more evident. *Mestizo* men with a whiter skin who had access to education, and *mestiza* women also with whiter skin who complied with the gender boundaries imposed by the Church and the Spanish society, made their way up the social hierarchy to join the white Spanish in the elite, or started the foundations of what was to be the middle-classes (Navarro and Sanchez, 1999).

Authors such as Kalmanovitz (1985), Ocampo (1987) and Bejarano (1987) argue that since Colombian independence in 1819 and throughout the 19th century, socioeconomic and cultural divisions were maintained in *La Sabana*, the region where most of the cut flower cultivation is located, based not only on colonial structures but also on new relations with international markets. In the past two centuries the socioeconomic division between landowners, mainly descendants of the 'white' Spaniards, and *campesinos* (peasants), mainly *mestizos*, was consolidated, with the former owning the land and the latter working it through labour arrangements such as sharecropping and tenancy. *Campesinos* lived in the *haciendas* or the nearby towns and supplied labour to the *haciendas* as direct wage labourers or through sharecropping and tenancy. The arrangements between landowners and *campesinos*, normally to split profits 50% - 50% or 60% - 40%, left the latter very little margin of gain, and in order to continue their reproductive cycle and to be competitive in the market, production was subsidised through the self-exploitation of women, men and children (Kalmanovitz, 1985, 1987).

La Sabana did not have a tradition of big plantations of sugar cane or bananas as in the Caribbean or the haciendas of Argentina and Paraguay. Its main production in colonial times came from the mines of emeralds, gold, and silver and scattered production of food for subsistence among the *campesinos*. Land was an asset which showed status rather than a tool for production (Molano, 1992a, 1992b).

This pattern of extraction and feudal agricultural arrangements continued after independence with the allocation of capital by the elite in international ventures such as extraction of rubber in the Amazon forest, rather than farming the land. The attachment to land as a signal of status impeded the formation of the Chayanovian 'farmer class' and rather firstly contributed to semi-proletarianisation (where *campesinos* are still in possession of some land but unable to reproduce from it and need to look for paid employment to complement what they produce on the land) and then led to the complete proletarianisation of *La Sabana's campesinos* (Ocampo, 1987, Kalmanovitz, 1985, 1987).

Location

Colombia is divided geographically into five zones, the Atlantic region, the Pacific region, the Andean region, the Eastern plains or *Llanos* and the Amazon region. This division has an impact on the development of sub regions, with factors such as roads, natural resources, quality of land and access to the centralised government playing an important role. For administrative purposes, Colombia has a central government, a presidency and administrative units called departments that cover geographically one or more of the regions mentioned; they have, to some degree,

autonomous local governments. Culturally it is even more fragmented, with factors such as 'race', regional settings, relationships with the cities or the land, ethnicity, economic activities and gender relations, building the different identities of Colombians. Colombia has one of the widest disparities of income in the world, less than 20% of the population controls 80% of the economic resources of the country. 60% of the population live under the poverty line (DANE, 2003).

Cut flower production is centred in two main locations in Colombia. The first and by far the most significant is located in the region I already mentioned known as *La Sabana*, surrounding the capital city of Bogotá and comprising around 92% of the flower exports. The second most important region is in *Rionegro* in Antioquia, near Medellín and accounts for almost 8% of flower exports together with another region, Valle. Both main flower regions have international airports close by. Since the regions and sub regions of Colombia are so different regarding cultural and socioeconomic characteristics we cannot generalise 'one' specific socioeconomic and cultural history for the whole country.

For the purposes of this research I am going to refer to the characteristics of *La Sabana*, bearing in mind that it is not isolated from other dynamics in the rest of the country, to which I will refer when relevant, such as forced migration and the displacement of population from other regions. *La Sabana's* altitude has an average of 2600 metres above sea level and temperatures vary between 0 and 21 degrees Celsius. Colombia is situated above the equator within the tropics and it has two main seasons, rainy and dry.

Origins

Flower cultivation for medicinal and food purposes has long been part of the indigenous cultures in Latin America (Pilcher, 1998). The cultivation and use of flowers was also influenced by the Spanish conquest and colonisation of Latin America that introduced new social, economic and cultural structures greatly influenced by the Catholic Church. Early sixteenth and seventeenth century religious paintings reproduce images of saints and Mary profusely adorned with flowers. Flowers were, and are, extensively used on special occasions such as funerals, weddings and birthdays and for every day use in household decoration. In rural areas on farms and in the gardens and balconies of urban areas throughout Colombia it is customary to plant flowers such as roses. Medellín, the above mentioned cut flower region, is known as the City of Eternal Spring and is famous for an annual flower festival, the *Festival de los Silleteros*.

Further research is needed to establish the development of cut flowers as commodities in the towns and cities in Colombia. However, given their representation and references in numerous books and paintings and their centrality to indigenous religions and Catholic rites, there might have been a small domestic trade in flowers. Farné points out that ‘thirty years ago flower growing was merely a household activity in Colombia. Small enterprises produced flowers whose market was exclusively domestic’ (1998:2). They were also possibly cultivated along with vegetables and fruit and taken to markets with these products.

In the second half of the 20th century, cut flower production for export in Colombia started within small family businesses. There are different opinions of who introduced export-oriented cut flowers to the country and why. An article in the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo* suggests that the first consignment of cut flowers was dispatched from Colombia by a USA citizen, Edgar Wells (*El Tiempo*, 1998a). Farné quotes Fairbanks and Lindsey (1997) giving a similar story except that the entrepreneur is said to be a Colombian who lived abroad for 20 years, and upon his return noticed the advantages that *La Sabana* offered for cut flower production (Farné, 1998:2). In a more structural view, Maritza Diaz in Salazar *et al* (1995) points out that the origins of cut flower cultivation can be traced to an advisor from USAID who came to Colombia in 1965. The advisor knew about a graduate thesis from the University of Colorado in the United States which argued that the meteorological conditions for the industrial cultivation of carnations in *La Sabana* were ideal. The advisor evaluated the possibilities of introducing flower growing in *La Sabana* de Bogotá (Salazar *et al*, 1995). Farné points out that in 1965 the first 17 tons of cut flowers were exported from Colombia (Farné, 1998).

In a similar fashion, Ortiz (2000) argues that flower growing in Colombia was promoted by international development bodies, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, as a development strategy for Southern countries. Flower production, she argues, was promoted and encouraged by the State through the provision of credits with low interest rates, bonds, and tariff and tax preferences within the general policy of diversification of non-traditional exports (2000:4).

The origin of the industry in Colombia is also linked to the threats of social, economic and political change that the ruling classes faced in the 1960s. The fear of agrarian reform resulted in some of the rural ruling class in different zones shifting their production, for example from extensive cattle ranching to bananas and cut flowers. This was because they sought to maximise the use of land and avoid expropriation of the land and also as a way to provide employment to curb social unrest (Medrano, 1982).

Gender

The period called *La Violencia*¹ in Colombia (1948- 1965) accelerated the economic transformations in *La Sabana*, as new agro-industries such as the manufacturing of dairy products were formed along with other industries including those producing footwear and tyres. The new industries broke to some extent the semi-feudal labour relations which had predominated in *La Sabana*. The landowners were traditionally supposed to own the land and be 'responsible' for the peasants who occupied the lands as sharecroppers or tenants.

In the initial stages of cut flower cultivation, these relations were translated from semi- feudal to capitalist forms of production (where still the workers have not been fully entitled to their rights). The 'wives and daughters' of sharecroppers or tenants were the first source of labour in the cut flower industry, therefore labour relations were maintained not only on the basis of class but also of gender, which made for a high degree of control over the labour force by the employers (Bejarano, 1987). In competition for labour with the shoe, textile, auto parts, plastics and dairy processing

industries in La Sabana, the new agro-industry of cut flowers resorted to the labour of women. Meier argues that demographic and social changes in Colombia also contributed to the availability of female labour (Meier, 1999:278).

Growth

Flower production for export started on a few small fields in *La Sabana*. Farné argues that by 1969 seven enterprises already existed there (1998:2). They were family-owned but they also incorporated foreign (mainly US) capital. It is important to note that even though they were considered family-owned companies we cannot talk about small producers because the costs of production are higher than for other agricultural products. In the year 2003, for example, the cost of rose production per hectare is approximately US\$16K, without counting the cost of land, whereas the cost of producing a hectare of potatoes is around US\$1K (source: personal communication). Although the land is commonly rented, its selling price is estimated at between US\$2K and US\$5K per hectare in the zones near Bogotá, whereas in other zones of Colombia dedicated to extensive cattle ranching the cost per hectare varies between US\$200 and US\$1K. In addition, cultivation and production require diverse and very expensive specialised technology that depends on foreign research, mostly carried out in the Netherlands and the USA (Van Wijk, 1994).

The first producers in the 1960s imported seeds and technology which were adapted to the conditions in *La Sabana*. At this time, the main flowers grown were carnations and roses. There were few insects and as a result very little pesticide was used. Most

of the fields were located in the central and western sub-regions and the main municipalities involved were Subachoque and Madrid (see map) (Montañez, 1992)

In the 1960s, 60% of the population of Cundinamarca department lived in the *La Sabana* and labour was first provided by working class women who could not get employment as men did as sharecroppers in the haciendas or in the agro-industries in the area. The two main options available to working class women in the area were domestic employment or migrating to the urban centre, Bogotá, to be engaged in industrial employment such as shoe and textile factories. Therefore in *La Sabana* there was already a surplus of female labour available for the new agro-industry of the cut flower sector. These 'positive conditions' i.e. the abundance of cheap female labour, the abundance of water and favourable weather conditions, allowed for the rapid expansion of flower production (Leon, 1996).

During the sixties and seventies the labour movement in Colombia extended its influence to national unions such as the CUT (Workers Central Union) and the CGTD (Confederation of Democratic Workers of Colombia) (Salazar *et al*, 1995). Cut flower workers were associated with the CGTD. The main claims for workers were around wages, benefits and working hours, and for peasants around the property of the land, access to credit and commercialisation of the products (Pearce, 1990).

By 1981, there were about 149 fields devoted to flower production, occupying 912 hectares of *La Sabana* (Montañez, 1992). An 'agricultural revolution' was

experienced with the import of sophisticated Dutch technology and the rationalisation of the production process. The new technology comprised new varieties of seeds which required, for example, less water but more fertilisers and pesticides, and included drip irrigation and temperature regulators using artificial light systems or air conditioning; all produced in the North. All resources started to be exploited intensively, natural resources (land and water), capital (technology) and labour. In terms of labour, specialisation of tasks and competition began to be encouraged, rewarded and expected. A big expansion of the sector took place in the middle of the 1980s, increasing exports from \$140 million in 1985 to \$340 million in 1992 (*Asocolflores*, no date). This expansion was possible because of the implementation of neo-liberal policies in Colombia, which favoured export-oriented production of cash crops which would not compete with other commodities produced by Northern countries. Laws and regulations around labour rights were relaxed and employment flexibilised (Pearce, 1990, Salazar *et al*, 1995, Ortiz, 2000). The comparative advantage of countries like Colombia is that they can supply flowers all year round, they have an abundance of cheap labour supplied mostly by women and permissive labour regulations (Salazar *et al*, 1995, Meier, 1999, Ortiz, 2000).

By 1984, most independent unions within the cut flower sector were being persecuted by the companies and the state security apparatus and ended up being dissolved. Today the in-house unions are in the majority. *Asocolflores* claims that the sector has a high percentage of unionisation compared with other sectors

(*Asocolflores*, no date). However, in the in-house unions and independent unions women workers only constitute 30 percent of membership.

Concentration

In 1990 the Colombian economy was opening up to international markets and this ongoing change was reflected in the relaxing of laws and regulations governing employment. At the same time the country was experiencing an agrarian crisis. Between 1992 and 1994, 400,000 hectares were removed from agrarian production and 200,000 jobs lost in the agricultural sector (CUT, 1995). Social and political violence continues to be very high in a country of 40 million people, resulting in high levels of forced migration. According to Codhes (2003) in the year 2000 alone about 315,384 people were displaced from urban and rural areas in Colombia.

The end of the 1990s saw the arrival of US multinationals in the sector, such as the US fruit company Dole that intended to add its commercialisation infrastructure to the production of cut flowers (*El Tiempo*, 1998b). There were also efforts by some US investors to centralise cut flower exports through a commercialisation company, USA Floral Products. Dole controls part of the production and commercialisation of bananas in Central America, the Caribbean and South America. The multinational bought four companies from the largest cut flower conglomerate in Colombia, *Floramérica*. This company owns *cultivos* in Bogotá, Medellín, Funza, Chiquinquirá and Tocancipá, with further plans to acquire more companies (*El Tiempo*, 1998b). Since this move, Dole now controls a quarter of the production and commercialisation of cut flowers in Colombia. The reasons for their interest in the

Colombian companies, as presented by the newspaper *El Tiempo*, are that 'their current fruit distribution network allows the multinational to take advantage of the international cut flower market, which amounts to US\$9000 million per year. Therefore, [the company] decided to buy producer companies in Colombia to self-supply its commercialisation chain in the United States' (*El Tiempo*, 1998b *my translation*).

In the late 1990s USA Floral Products Inc. started to buy and take over distribution companies in the USA. However, their interest was only on the commercialisation side. Robert Poirier, President of USA Floral, pointed out that 'we are not interested in the acquisition of cut flower companies, neither in Colombia nor in other parts of the world' (*El Tiempo*, 1998b *my translation*). *Semana* magazine (June, 1998 and February, 2001) informed readers that other companies involved in banana production and commercialisation, such as Del Monte and Chiquita have also disclosed plans to take over Colombian companies producing cut flowers.

The combination of the entrance of Dole and the intent of USA Floral to consolidate the commercialisation channels was seen as changing the face of cut flower production because the companies intended to market flowers directly from Colombia to the main USA markets (*Semana*, 1998). The tendency within the sector therefore, has been not of expanding cultivated areas but of concentrating diverse farms under the economies of scale and ownership of major multinationals. USA Floral, that only took into account one part of the trade chain, the commercialisation of flowers, was having serious economic problems by 2001. *Semana* reported that in

this year the value of its shares fell from US\$27 to 80 cents (February, 2001). By 2002 the initiative had collapsed. The arrival of other multinationals including Del Monte and Chiquita, predicted by *Semana* in 1998 and again in 2001, has not yet materialised.

In 1990 there were more than 300 fields in cut flower production, comprising 3173 hectares. Thus while the number of fields in cultivation has doubled since 1981, the amount of land in cultivation has tripled. In 1996, other areas started to cultivate flowers, namely the provinces of Antioquia and El Valle. However, by the second half of the 1990s the growth of the sector slowed and even went into decline. From US\$556.2 million in 1998, exports decreased slightly to US\$550.5 in 1999, although they showed a small recovery in 2000, increasing by US\$30.0 million. Today there are approximately 500 companies affiliated to *Asocolflores* involved in flower production for export. The cultivated area that rapidly grew in the 1980s tended to stagnate at 4500 hectares and 5000 hectares for the years 1998 to 2000. 150 cut flower companies were reported by *Semana* magazine to have gone out of business in the year 2001 (*Semana*, 2001).

We have therefore three special moments in the history of flower growing in Colombia. First its beginnings in the 1960s under the auspices of the international development bodies as a development alternative for countries such as Colombia. Second, the expansion of the sector in the 1980s, supported by State tax, credits and tariff benefits, widening at the same time the offer of employment, especially for women. And the third stage, at the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s,

when the sector entered a period in which the ownership of the farms tended to be concentrated in the hands of fewer owners, one of them a multinational corporation. Sector concentration has brought closure of companies and employment layoffs.

Labour practices

Two types of labour practices are becoming more predominant in the flower sector: contracting workers for terms shorter than a year and subcontracting work (Cactus, 1996; 1997; 1998, Colectivo Bernardo Adam, 1999). Piece work is contracted using intermediaries. Tasks such as planting, cutting, pruning and even fumigation are subcontracted to a third person who recruits people in order to fulfil these particular functions for a given period of time. The payment is often less than in contracted work and workers are paid per task rather than for the time required to complete that task. In addition, the worker is not always sure who their employer is and the workers could be cheated out of payment and benefits. According to Cactus, subcontracting in Madrid 'is an extensive phenomenon' (1996:4). In this municipality, four temporary labour service companies were identified. In just one neighbourhood, Cactus found no less than 22 independent contractors. There is a high degree of law flouting; for example, there are known cases of employers paying just US \$0.50 for planting a bed of flowers (which could be a strip of land between 38 and 52 metres long by 75 cm wide).

Furthermore, employers use probationary periods without a written contract to avoid paying benefits to workers. Contracting workers for short periods of time creates problematic situations. Firstly, there is a high turnover of personnel which does not

allow for training and promotion of workers. According to Cactus, this turnover has been accelerated in past years in an attempt to increase productivity by the companies (Cactus, 1997). Secondly, this produces a sense of alienation among workers and a lack of information about their rights and the system. The working period is very short and the specificity of tasks does not allow them to know the whole process and to adapt and become familiar with the environment and forms of organisation. So short contracts make labour organisation much more difficult.

Overtime is very common and workers could increase their wage by 40% by working overtime. Although it is illegal to work more than 2 hours overtime per day, a worker often needs to work overtime to earn enough money to survive and/or is obliged to work overtime by the company (Ferrer, 1995; Colectivo Bernardo Adam, 1999). In addition, a worker is often not given due notice for when they will be expected to work overtime. There are also various quotas that a worker has to fulfil. For example, a worker in the flower selection section must make 60 bunches of flowers per hour, and if she is unable to complete this rate of output within working hours, is obliged to complete it after hours, without pay. In addition, the supervisors establish a system of competition in order to increase productivity. There is a bonus system that varies from US\$2 to US\$10 per month for workers who exceed fixed quotas, complete them in less time or do not ask for permits to go to the doctor (Cactus, 1997, Colectivo Bernardo Adam, 1999).

Labour relations within the cut flower sector in Colombia have been influenced by the origins of the sector. The 'family' nature of the companies determined patterns

of paternalistic behaviour of the employers towards the workers (Meier, 1999). This is a legacy of the semi-feudal structures which dominated production relations in *La Sabana*, and Colombia in general, until the 1950s. To some extent these relations still feature, at least in rhetoric, as we can see from the home page of one of the companies dedicated to the production of cut flowers:

Because we know that everyone who works on the farm contributes to its continuing success, we think of our employees as family. Workers benefit from health care and instruction, low-interest construction loans and a credit union. These programs contribute to a strong community spirit.

Leafy vegetables are scarce in the Andes, but not at Las Amalias. We've planted vegetable gardens right next to the greenhouses. Cabbages, artichokes, lettuce and tomatoes supplement our workers' diets in our company-subsidised cafeteria. Honey produced by our own bees is sold to them at less than market price. The proceeds buy stereos for the greenhouses, so soft classical music soothes flowers and growers alike.

Our workers reward us with loyalty. Many have been with us all their working lives. Respected, long-term employees with a firm foundation of experience guarantee the high quality of our product, consistently.

At Las Amalias, we concentrate on the people who make our flowers. Jose Fetecua (16 years) Rose greenhouse supervisor: 'We spend a lot of time at this company, so we've learned to take good care of it'. (Las Amalias, 1997)

There are other forms of control such as writing in the contracts that the workers are not allowed to discuss labour practices or technological issues within the company or outside the company (information from Cactus 1997). The managers, contractors and subcontractors have lists of people who have been involved in union activism or who are considered 'troublesome' and they check against the list before hiring labourers. The companies exchange and share this information across *La Sabana* and

there are testimonies that this information has been extended to Medellín and to the banana sector in the north of the country (information from Cactus 1997).

Cut flower cultivation, a Colombian success story?

To assess whether a strategy of ‘development’ is successful we need to look at different aspects such as revenues for the host country, type of employment offered, transference of technology and infrastructure created. The discourse of the history of cut flower cultivation in Colombia as a success story has been analysed by Van Wijk (1994), Farné (1998) and Meier (1995; 1999), taking into account aspects such as technology, labour and gender issues respectively.

Revenues and employment

Asocolflores argues that cut flower production has ‘modernised’ labour relations and working practices in the agro-industrial sector in Colombia (*Asocolflores*, no date). They highlight the dramatic increase in the value of cut flower exports and argue that (in a period of 30 years) Colombia has gone from exporting flowers worth US\$20K in 1965 to more than US\$600 million in 2001 (*Asocolflores*, no date). They also maintain that ‘according to figures provided by the Colombian government statistics bureau (DANE), the flower industry ranked first in 2000 as international revenue generator among non-traditional exports’ (*Asocolflores*, 2003 *my translation*).

A close look at the statistics from the Ministry for External Trade indeed shows that cut flower exports have increased their share of total exports from 3.9% in 1991 to

5.7% in 2002 (Mincomex, 2003). Regarding 'raw material'² exports, cut flowers have increased their share from 5.7% in 1991 to approximately 9% of the total 'raw material' exports by the year 2002. By the year 2000, Colombian cut flower exports were US\$672 million; Colombian total exports were US\$11.9 billion where 'raw material' exports accounted for US\$7 billion and industrial products for US\$4.9 billion (Mincomex, 2003). Statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics (DANE) for the years 2001 and 2002 also show that cut flowers rank fifth in the non-traditional exports³ after chemicals, food and beverages, machinery and equipment, and textiles (DANE, 2003).

Asocolflores states that some 75,000 people work directly and some 50,000 indirectly for the flower growing sector (*Asocolflores*, 2001a). Indirect jobs include for example, working in the plastics industry to produce the plastic to cover the greenhouses and the production of cardboard boxes in which cut flowers are transported. However Ortiz, based on a study done by Montañez (1992), estimates that the amount of direct employment generated by the flower sector at its peak during the 1980s and the early 1990s is considerably less than the figures published by *Asocolflores*. She argues that *Asocolflores* uses employment generation figures as one of the arguments to maintain their tax and tariff privileges, nationally and internationally (2000:4).

As to the quality of the employment offered by the sector, *Asocolflores* argues that:

The employees of the flower industry receive legally mandated and additional benefits, and their jobs are stable year round. Total coverage of social security, pensions and professional risks guarantees total coverage of any personal or

family health incident, and the possibility of receiving a pension upon retirement. The improvement of the employees' standard of living by providing them, their families, and the communities located near the plantations with far and wide reaching services and programs is a permanent effort of the industry as a whole and of the Association in particular. (*Asocolflores*, 2001a)

Farné's (1998) and Meier's (1995; 1999) analysis of the employment offered by the cut flower sector in Colombia, in terms of quantity, quality and its impact on the women workers, tends to reinforce this rosy view.

Labour issues

Farné (1998) starts by praising the sector; he says that 'flower growing in Colombia is truly a success story. In the span of just 30 years, the first US\$20,000 of sales abroad have "blossomed" to US\$510 million and from simply being one item among many exports, floriculture today heads the list of non-traditional exports' (1998:2). In his analysis of the employment provided by the sector he separates out different aspects: wages and benefits, temporary work, subcontracting, working time, labour turnover, employment seniority, trade unionism, child labour, labour inspection, occupational health and social environment. Based on these criteria he identifies three types of companies: the ones which comply with the labour legislation and care for the well-being of their workers; the ones where the scale of production does not enable the conditions of work to be raised beyond those strictly required by the law and for which the main means of competing in the market is through the compression of labour costs; and the third group, where the workforce is recruited through labour subcontractors: 'some of these undoubtedly care for the welfare of the workers, but there are also studies available which denounce the precarious

conditions of employment of the workers who are contracted through labour subcontractors' (1998:19). He concludes that 'the labour market in the flower-growing sector in Colombia is characterized by urban as well as rural characteristics, as well as being clearly fragmented' (1998:19). He also remarks that: 'in totality the labour market structure in the Colombian flower-growing sector is typical of developing countries; there is a formal sector, well structured, which offers good conditions of employment, but there is also an informal sector where conditions of work are poor' (Farné, 1998:19-20).

Farné's arguments are similar to the ones used by *Asocolflores* to counteract the impact of the cut flower campaigns in Europe. Their argument is that the formal sector, e.g. the companies associated with *Asocolflores*, is complying with the labour regulations and looking after the well being of the workers, and it is the informal sector, e.g. companies that are outside of the Association, that is not complying with the labour regulations. *Asocolflores* argues that the campaigners in Europe and Colombia put the three types of companies together and do not differentiate; and as a result 'good' companies have to cope with the damage to their reputation caused by the 'bad' ones (*Asocolflores*, no date). In the next chapters we shall see that the polarisation between the 'formal' and the 'informal' sectors is not too sharp, as we find some characteristics that Farné attributes to the 'informal' sector operating in farms associated with *Asocolflores*. Besides, even though it is not a requisite for the cut flower exporting companies to be associated with *Asocolflores*, in order to be able to export their products, almost all exporting farms are members of the Association. FlowerTech reports *Asocolflores* as 'having about 240 members, or

90% of all Colombian flower producers' (2000:9-10). Since almost 95% of the flowers produced commercially in Colombia are for export, it leaves a small number of cut flower companies outside of the Association.

How successful is the cut flower employment for women [workers]?

Meier explores the reasons for the success of the sector, beyond the rhetoric of entrepreneurial ability and good environmental conditions. She explains that:

The emergence of cut flowers for export can be seen as part of a large restructuring process of the Colombian economy along neoclassical economic guidelines...lowering trade barriers and giving high priorities to export production have been government strategies as much as has been the adjustment of labour legislation and the social security systems to meet the entrepreneurs' demands for cheap labour. (Meier, 1999:273)

She points out that the demands for cheap labour were met by following a growing trend throughout Latin America:

Women are a growing part of the labour pool, and the feminisation of the labour force has been a prominent feature of recent economic restructuring. However, as Gilbert also observes, this feminisation has been going on in Latin America since the 1960s and must be seen as 'part of a secular trend' embedded in wider social and economic changes. (Meier, 1999: 274)

She therefore argues that the production of flowers for export has taken advantage of and reinforced, rather than created, this trend. Meier mentions the debates about the impact that this type of employment has on women and argues that one way to approach the 'employment versus empowerment' debate is to examine the changes in ownership of productive resources, and the responsibility and authority exercised by women and men; such an approach is taken by Faulkner and Lawson (1991) in Ecuador. She considers that since 'cut flower production has relatively high wages

for women, even in dependant positions, although they might score low in this kind of empowerment scale their purchasing power and their influence on household decisions have increased considerably' (Meier, 1999:274).

In Meier's interviews, the majority of people who talk about workers' conditions are not the women workers themselves but 'external experts': the owners of flower farms or the professionals employed at flower farms. Meier's analysis, therefore, does not see exploitation so much in terms of gender but class. She argues that: 'for urban professional women, employment in the flower industry as a manager, lawyer, doctor, social worker, receptionist, secretary, or a biologist means working in one of Colombia's most dynamic industries. Good pay together with further technical training and career advancement may be attained' (Meier, 1999:281).

In contrast women workers' voices are heard when talking about the 'advantages' that they have working with the industry *vis a vis* other types of employment, or about good places to work. Meier points out that: 'according to the workers, the key determinants of a good place to work are official contracts with reliable pay and overtime payments, social security, provision of transport to work, free medical care, and, moreover, being treated with respect' (1999:283). An interesting aspect arising from the article is the contrast between the apparent 'freedom' of the workers to choose where to work and the apparent incapability of the workers to change working conditions within the 'bad' flower farms. Meier argues that 'once they live in a 'flower village', workers collect information about working conditions at different farms and attempt to find work in the better ones'. However, she observes

that 'changing working conditions at the farms seems to be more difficult' (Meier, 1999: 284).

Transference of technology

Van Wijk discusses the Colombian model of cut flower production and he argues that 'the cut flower sector is one of the great success stories in the history of Colombian exports. This achievement has been based on beneficial growing conditions and entrepreneurial skills of exporters to bring perishable products to the foreign market, rather than on intensive breeding research' (1994:4). He adds that:

Colombian flower growers solely use varieties that are obtained from foreign breeders. Rather than breeding, propagation technology is being developed in Colombia. Colombian companies obtain mother stock plants from abroad, select individuals that have good performance under local conditions and propagate them...

About four companies in Colombia are allowed by foreign breeders to propagate from a protected variety generations which are older than the mother plant. *Propagar Plantas S.A.*, for example, receives from the foreign breeder cuttings or shoots of a very early generation of carnation varieties which are stored on a special substrate in the company's private gene bank. Depending on the demand of [sic] a specific variety, the shoots are developed stepwise into shoots of the mother variety. The shoots are cold-stored for a period of no more than 6 months and are taken out when the demand is sufficient. Then, specific hormones are used to stimulate root growth so that the plants can be sent to the farms. For every plant produced, royalties have to be paid to the foreign breeder. (Van Wijk, 1994:5)

The lack of breeding technology in Colombia generates dependency on other countries; Van Wijk explains that 'the Colombian cut flower production relies on germplasm from Europe, the USA, Israel and some other countries. This is remarkable for a country that is one of the world's centres of "*mega biodiversity*". Some of the commercial flowers grown in Colombia, such as alstroemeria, are actually native to Latin America' (1994:4).

The lack of breeding technology, resulting in technological dependency and the duty of paying royalties, is not seen as problematic by Farné. He argues that ‘the trade balance is highly positive since flower imports [in Colombia] do not raise much above US\$10 million annually ’(1998:3). In a footnote he explains that ‘these [imports] are fundamentally mother plants for production purposes, the principal suppliers of which are Holland, Israel and the United States’ (Farné, 1998: 3).

Van Wijk also states that ‘the payment for royalties for growing varieties of foreign breeders is not considered to be a big problem as long as business is profitable. The main point of concern for the flower growers is rather to get quick access to the latest flower varieties under reasonable conditions’ (1994:5).

Van Wijk’s analysis of the trade balance does not take into account other imports that are also considerable in cut flower production. There are imports such as chemicals in the form of pesticides and fertilisers, irrigation parts and technology, spraying parts and technology and information in the form of market research. The other aspect he does not consider is the importance of the transference of technology such as breeding technology for the development of domestic research. Even though the cost of the dependency on foreign breeders is still not comparatively high, in terms of the trade balance, it could become costly in the future when Colombia will not have the appropriate technology to identify and breed her own varieties of flowers. Intellectual property rights in flowers are also part of the growing business of the international trade in cut flowers.

For the profitability of the cut flower business in Colombia, authors such as Medrano (1980 and 1982), Viveros (1982), Villar (1982), Salazar *et al* (1995), Leon (1996) and Ortiz (2000) argue that factors such as lower production costs, longer and/or complementary growing seasons, and less state regulations have a secondary importance and that the structure of land ownership in the region and the socioeconomic characteristics resulting from these relationships were the more advantageous factors in the 'successful history of cut flowers'.

The impact of macroeconomic policies such as Structural Adjustment Policies on the provision of employment and flexibilisation of labour regulations, the 'double' burden of women and therefore the need for flexible employment and the relatively low wages and working conditions in other agricultural and agro-industrial sectors, might be some of the reasons behind why women seek paid employment in the cut flower industry. Certainly, the majority of the workers in the cut flower industry in Colombia are women. They perform physically demanding, risky and time consuming jobs and their wages are at the bottom of the salary pyramid. It could be argued that the success of the cut flower industry, which is represented as bringing pride to the Colombian image and being explicitly 'clean' (free of drugs), relies on the exploitation of women workers.

Meier argues that 'women are in demand at flower farms and many women want this work' (1999:280). The reasons for the demand for women workers in the cut flower industry might not be different from those in other trade-related employment,

such as the garment, textile and fruit industries around the world. These reasons include: the construction of women's labour as 'unskilled' and therefore attracting a low wage, the absence of state control, the 'double' burden that many women have to confront and that allows them less time for organising themselves into unions and grass-roots organisations and the construction of 'rural women' as docile and ignorant of their rights.

3.2 Producing, importing and consuming flowers in the UK

A report from the International Trade Centre (ITC) placed the UK in 1995 as the third biggest importer of cut flowers worldwide after Germany and the USA, the UK imports totalling US\$360 million (ITC, 1997). Five years later, in the year 2000, the value of imports was US\$533 million (Pathfast Publishing, 2001), an increase of 32% compared to 1995.

Although the market for flowers and pot plants was estimated in 1999 to be around GB£4 billion (FlowerTech, 1999), per capita consumption of floricultural products is still very low in the United Kingdom compared with consumption in most other European countries. According to the Flower & Plants Association (F&PA), British per capita consumption amounted to £26 in 2003 and for the rest of Europe people regularly spend between £60 and £100 per year on cut flowers and indoor plants (F&PA, 2003).

ITC points out that the ex-farm value of cut flower production in the UK (excluding the Channel Islands) was estimated at £84.15 million in 1995. Field-grown cut

flowers and forced bulbs accounted for £48.1 million, alstroemerias £6.7 million, carnations £1.9 million, year round chrysanthemums £18.6 million, natural-season chrysanthemums £5.8 million, and roses £1.5 million. In 1995 the production of the Channel Islands reached £22.4 million (1997:81).

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), quoted by the ITC (1997), reported that in 1995 the UK had 6,471 hectares planted to flowers and bulbs in the open. In England and Wales, the area planted in greenhouses was 335 ha in 1995, of which year-round chrysanthemums took 139.4 hectares, natural-season chrysanthemums 84 hectares, carnations 4.7 hectares, pinks (*dianthus* hybrids) 10.6 hectares, alstroemeria 25.6 hectares and other flowers 50 hectares. To meet the increasing demand from the consumers and with stagnant local production, the markets have resorted to imports (ITC, 1997).

Changes in trade structure

Part of the growth in the value of cut flower imports is due to the changes that have happened at retailing level. In the past decade the cut flower retail market has undergone a major change in leading actors. In 1990 the traditional florist accounted for 43% by value of all retail cut flower sales; by 1995 this share had fallen to 39%. In contrast, the supermarkets' market share over the same period increased from 15% to 25%. Street traders hold an estimated 14% of the market, garden centres 8%, garage forecourts 5%, postal flowers 1% and all other outlets 10% (ITC, 1997). The florist's biggest competitors are the supermarkets; however, florists have still the best range of flowers available and a quasi monopoly on the sale of flowers for gifts.

Interflora, Teleflorist and Flowergram are major players in the florist trade and approximately 6,000 florists accept telephone orders for delivery (ProFound, 1996) (see table 3.2).

Tesco, the largest supermarket in the UK, reportedly shared 7.5% of the total flower and plant sales in the country (FlowerTech, 1999). In all, by the year 2000 an ILO report argues that the market share of supermarkets was approaching 40 per cent (2000). ILO remarks that:

What is certain is that from Israel to the United Kingdom and from the Netherlands to the United States, supermarkets are targeting the flower trade as an area for expansion... The number of supermarkets that sell flowers has increased and so has the quality of the flowers for sale. In the past the selection of flowers for sale in supermarkets was small and a low price was considered more important than high quality, today supermarkets are setting the trend in certain areas. Because of their market power they are having a significant influence on growing and trading practices. In Switzerland the Migros chain sells environmentally sound MPS-A flowers...In the United Kingdom, Tesco guarantees, depending on the product, a vase life of 7-14 days. (2000:unnumbered)

ITC reports that 'trade sources forecast that the supermarkets' share of cut flowers sales could reach 50% by the turn of the century' (1997:83). By 1999, it is reported that 'UK cut flower sales have doubled in the last 10 years and continue to grow and supermarket cut flower sales are increasing at over 30% per year with an even greater potential for growth' (Adas, 1999). Tesco reports increases in sales of 140% over the period 1996-1999 (FlowerTech, 1999).

Table No. 3.2

Retail distribution channels for cut flowers in the UK, 1995 (percentages)

	Expenditure	Volume
Florist	39.4	28.0
Supermarkets	24.7	23.4
Street markets	14.0	20.7
Greengrocers	6.8	10.6
Garden centres	3.6	3.2
Other	11.5	4.1
	100.0 %	100.0 % [sic]

Source: ProFound, 1996

The secret of their success

Supermarkets only started actively marketing cut flowers less than ten years ago, although Tesco reports that they started selling plants and flowers around 1987 (FlowerTech, 1999). ITC maintains that Safeway led the way in 1995 when it introduced self-selection bunch making in a limited number of stores:

Based on a free-standing carousel display, a selection of 20 flowers and foliage mini-bunches in buckets were offered to customers at £1.89/bunch or £4.99 for three bunches. Sainsbury's (the second largest supermarket group) opened its first full florist department in 1996. The range of flowers available included single blooms and pre-bunched flowers. The latter bunches ranged in price from £1.50 to £10.00. Trained florists were also available to make up mix-and-match bouquets, to give advice and to take special orders. (ITC, 1997:83)

Two main reasons have been given for the success of the supermarkets in cut flower sales. The first is the enormous purchasing power of the large supermarket chains that allows them to buy flowers directly from growers (ProFound, 1996). The ITC report points out that there have been major changes in the distribution of cut flowers in the country; supermarkets are bypassing the traditional channels such as

the auctions in Holland and domestic wholesale markets (1997). The ILO report states that:

Shortening the chain of intermediaries between growers and retailers is a key objective for supermarkets. It gives them more control over who their suppliers are, and more information on the conditions of work at these suppliers. It lowers costs and reduces delay (and thus lengthens vase life). As an observer from the United States remarked: 'The influence of supermarkets has become much larger, and they are more sophisticated. They are taking more of a higher quality product, and there is much more emphasis on quality, not price. Before supermarkets entered the picture, importers sold almost exclusively to wholesalers, with very definite lines as to how the chain of distribution was laid out. You never crossed those lines ... now, supermarkets call importers; supermarkets call Colombian farms.' (Mr. Andrew Hamer, Director of Operations for Floramor, which is part of Floramex, one of the largest cut flower traders in the world, quoted in *Floraculture International*, March 1998, p. 24.)

African producers appear to be the main beneficiaries of this change in purchasing habits. Supermarkets are interested in African flowers because they are inexpensive and because growers are willing to accept a set price. To the growers the arrangement is attractive because supermarkets buy large quantities at prearranged prices. But in order to live up to their side of the bargain African growers must invest in optimal production methods. Often this includes investments in greenhouses, forced ventilation and heating and, in all cases, greater attention to quality. (ILO, 2000: unnumbered)

Sourcing directly from the growers has also allowed the supermarkets to develop the second competitive aspect in increasing their role in cut flower sales: the commercialisation of flowers in ready made mixed bunches or bouquets, some of them directly assembled in the South. ITC states that:

The entry of the supermarkets into flower marketing is closely associated with companies who are able to prepare mixed bunches (bouquets). Whereas initially the supermarkets purchased bouquets mainly from the Netherlands, in recent years the trend has favoured the grower-packer, and in particular packers with closer links to overseas producers. Among the important United Kingdom packers are Flower Plus, Lingarden, Southern Glasshouse Produce, World Flowers and Zwetloos. These companies have developed close links with overseas producers. Marks and Spencer (the leading store group) was the first multiple buyer to procure bouquets produced overseas. With the emphasis on quality, it is expected that more United Kingdom supermarkets will make every

effort to shorten the distribution chain by going directly to overseas suppliers. However, it is equally probable that these supermarkets will favour overseas producers with packaging/distribution facilities in the UK. (ITC, 1997:83)

Thus Marks and Spencer have outsourced not only cut flower production to the South but also the processing of cut flowers into ready made bouquets, which is now done on the sourcing farms such as Homegrown in Kenya. Tesco also sources ready made bunches from farms like Osearian in Kenya, although its main supplier of bouquets is Zwetsloots located in Sandy (Bedfordshire) which in turn buys flowers from all over the world, sourcing about 40% from the Netherlands (FlowerTech, 1999).

FlowerTech, referring to Tesco's ability to position itself at the top of the flower market, points out: 'the way to become the leader in flower selling supermarkets is straightforward: keep the chain as short as possible, so the flowers reach the stores as soon as possible' (1999:10). As pointed out by FlowerTech in their article about Tesco's success:

First they lowered the price of flowers for the consumer, and now they want to enlarge their market share based on quality issues. That is a very successful strategy. Tesco is now the market leader in selling flowers and plants, due to good vase life and the guarantees they give for their products. (1999, 10)

Regarding prices, ITC states that:

With the entry of the supermarkets, there has been a narrowing of retail prices, with a pattern of fixed target retail prices emerging. In 1995, for example, the target retail price for the mixed bunches was £2.99 to £3.99. The precise content of the bunch varies with the season, as does the number of stems in the bunch (from three to seven). Bunches may include carnations, chrysanthemums, alstroemeria lilies, aster and foliage. In addition, to mixed bunches, all the supermarkets offer bunches of spray carnations. (1997:84)

Retail structure and product type

Historically, cut flower consumption in the UK has been dominated by carnations and chrysanthemums. In recent years the range of species traded has widened, but demand for the non-traditional flowers remains significantly lower than in all the other markets in the EU (ITC, 1997). In 1995, PVS (the Netherlands Commodity Board for Floricultural Products) reported that 14 types of flowers accounted for 90% of UK sales. In 1995, carnations were the most popular flower (22%), followed by chrysanthemums (10%), narcissus (4%) and roses (3%) (ProFound, 1996).

By the year 2001, the top ten flowers sold in the UK market were carnations, chrysanthemums, roses, lilies, freesias, daffodils, tulips, irises, alstroemeria and gladioli (F&PA, 2001). However, a survey carried out by the same F&PA two years later showed that the most popular were roses, followed by freesias, sweet peas and lilies (F&PA, 2003).

The ITC report argues that demand for individual flowers and specific colours is influenced by many factors, and predictions about future consumer demand in 1997 favoured carnations, with pink to gain popularity over red and a common trend towards pastel shades (1997:82). They also argue that ‘the seasons influence colour preferences, white being favoured at Christmas and Easter, yellows and pastel shadows in spring, and yellow and bronzes in Autumn’(1997:82). ProFound suggests that ‘the British demand is rather traditional: pink carnations, red roses and white chrysanthemums are the products most in demand, even if the product range widens’ (1996:41).

Market research has mapped out the characteristics that UK consumers associate with particular flowers, as well as the main uses for which they are purchased, as shown in table 3.3 below.

Table No. 3.3

Images and uses of the various cut flower species as perceived by the British consumer

Daffodils	Warm, cheerful, simple	Own use
Tulips	Stylish, vulnerable, modern, expensive	Special occasions
Rose	Elegant, luxury, expensive	Special occasions
Lily	Grand, elegant, unfamiliar	Special occasions(to impress)
Chrysanthemum	Practical, old-fashioned, inexpensive	Own use
Carnation	Appreciated, reliable	All occasions
Iris	Formal, old-fashioned, royal	Special occasions
Freesia	Delicate, sweet-smelling, expensive	Personal gift
Alstroemeria	Look like mini lily, unknown	
Gerbera	Un-known, modern, artificial	For mixed bouquet

Source: ProFound (1996)

These associations show a broad division between flowers bought for special occasions, with an elegant, stylish and expensive image, and those bought for own use, with a homely, simple and inexpensive image. Chapter 5 pursues this hierarchy in relation to the UK consumers I interviewed.

Table 3.3 does not show clearly which flowers are generally bought as gifts, but in 1995 Mintel, (a source of consumer-related market intelligence) reported a high level of gift purchase accounting for 71% of the sales. The remaining 29% of purchases were for home use. However, it looks as though this balance is shifting and the increased proportion of single person households is considered to be

beneficial for increasing demand for decorative flowers in the home (ITC, 1997). By the year 2003, according to the F&PA, buying flowers for use in the home had increased dramatically to 60% of the GB£1.5 billion spent (F&PA, 2003). These changes also reflect the transformation of the trading structure; the supermarkets have been expanding the total sales of cut flowers by encouraging customers to buy flowers for their own use. Traditionally, selling cut flowers for gifts has been dominated by florists, and since they have been losing their market share to the supermarkets, gift purchasing might be stagnant but not necessarily reduced in the value of sales or volume.

Historically, the level of consumption varies from season to season, and in 1997 nearly 18% of flower sales in the UK took place on Mother's Day and 10% on Valentine's Day when demand is almost exclusively for roses. The other periods of peak demand were Christmas (chrysanthemums), with 10% of sales, and Easter 8% (daffodils and lilies) (ITC, 1997). It is arguable that the supermarkets' strategy is to boost demand to a steady level at other times of the year, by encouraging consumers to decorate their homes with flowers needing regular replenishment.

Summary and conclusion

This chapter began with a brief history of Colombia explaining that the social, economic and political structures from the Spanish colonial period still have strong influence in the stratification of the country. As a result, the country is deeply divided along classed, 'racial' and gendered lines, with one of the widest disparities in income in the world. The social and economic structures present in *La Sabana*

ensured the availability of 'cheap' female labour and made it a fertile ground for the beginning of the cut flower industry. Colombia started its cut flower production in the 1960s, encouraged by international development bodies, but it was initially small-scale.

Cut flower production, trade and consumption have increased internationally over the past 40 years but it was only in the 1980s that it expanded in Colombia, due to the ever-increasing availability of 'cheap' labour, mostly female, natural resources and low taxation and import tariffs. The tendency today is for concentration of the industry. According to FlowerTech magazine 'some 260 individuals own about 460 farms' (1999:8) and production is concentrating even more with the arrival of the multinational Dole that is in control of nearly 25% of cut flower production in the country (*Semana*, 2001).

In the UK, the ILO points out that 'the share of all flowers that is being sold by supermarkets is on the increase' (2000, unnumbered). This is mainly due to the purchasing capacity of the supermarkets to buy directly from large suppliers and through long-term contracts and the commercialisation of flowers in ready made mixed bunches or bouquets, some of them directly assembled in the South. The ILO points out that the Dutch growers are obliged to sell their products through the auctions and cannot commit to the stringent long term contracts that the supermarkets want. They argue that this is one of the reasons why the supermarkets resort to buying their flowers from Africa, where growers are prepared to commit to

long-term contracts and are capable of delivering large quantities of flowers (2000, unnumbered).

The availability of cheap labour, cheap resources such as water, and state and international 'development' bodies' support, in the form of credits and tax and tariff exemptions, is hardly mentioned by the sources I consulted in accounting for the expansion of cut flower production and trade.

¹ On April 9, 1948, the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a left populist in line for the Presidency, who threatened to end the rule of the elite that had dominated the social, political and economic life of Colombia during the past century, ignited a period known as *La Violencia*. *La Violencia* spanned the years 1948 until 1965, during which time between 200,000 and 300,000 people were massacred by the military and paramilitary forces of the conservative state and the liberal guerrillas formed to resist and take revenge for the atrocities done by the state and para-state forces (Pearce, 1990).

² Clearly cut flowers are not raw materials, they have been 'processed' and will not receive any further processing in the importing countries, but this designation may relate to tax purposes.

³ Thrupp (1995) argues that the use of the term 'non-traditional exports' is relative. She points out that 'some products that are "traditional" exports in one country are "non-traditional" in another...given this complexity, some analysts prefer to use the term "high value" exports when referring to these emerging diversified crops' (Thrupp, 1995:2)

Chapter 4: WORKING WITH FLOWERS

Introduction

The international flower trade is fuelled by thousands and thousands of workers around the world. As with many other export-oriented industries, structures as well as individual circumstances play a role in leading people to work within the cut flower trade, be it as workers in the plantations, entrepreneurs, managers or florists. In this chapter I will place the spotlight on the meanings of flowers and on the processes of production of flowers, as they are discursively constructed by various individuals reflecting upon and describing their work.

I shall begin with the question I asked my informants: ‘how do you come to work with flowers?’ Their answers will be used to identify the constraints, resources and opportunities that led to this outcome, using Bourdieu’s concepts of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Taking into account that all capitals are context specific, I have selected some informants’ stories to illustrate that what they perceive in their individual histories as ‘chance’, actually presents some patterns that are shaped by wider structures, such as changes in macroeconomic policies and institutions such as patriarchy.

In the second part of the chapter I examine the labour process involved in cut flower production in Colombia, privileging the competing accounts given by the various actors involved with it. The owner/manager discourse that flowers are an industrial product that is modernising Colombia’s ‘backward’ peasantry, and the

discipline and surveillance of labour associated with it, is set against the worker's discourse that flowers are produced on the backs of the artisanal skills of exploited workers.

4.1 ENTERING THE SECTOR: A MATTER OF CHANCE OR DESIGN?

It was almost a forced choice because in *La Sabana* de Bogotá there are no more products you can grow in greenhouses...then I took advantage of the existent infrastructure I had for fruit and changed it into flowers. *I landed into this business almost without wanting to do it...* (William - *emphasis added*)

Let's say, this thing with the flowers *was a coincidence*, my sister had this business but then she lived in the other town, she had an employee here but it didn't work, she wasn't doing anything with this [business]. Then my husband bought the business from her. (Lilia - *emphasis added*).

when I started with the flowers it was by chance, and it was because one day I bought a car and I needed to pay for it and I had a look in the newspaper and it said that supervisors were needed in the production part of the plantation and I didn't have any experience and said to myself I am gonna get experience in flowers. (Narciso – *emphasis added*)

We started the floristeria by chance... I can tell you that when we bought the place there was a flower shop here... then what happened was that people continued phoning and asking for flowers. (Petunia - *emphasis added*)

The above quotes from entrepreneurs and managers in the sector all explain their work in the sector as matter of chance. However, as their narratives got underway it became clear that their arrival in the cut-flower sector was not a chance event by any means. It was actually a (predictable) product of their various forms of capital in combination with wider institutions and economic factors.

Constraints

Constraints are not only lack of capitals, in quantity and diversity, but also the non-recognition or de-legitimation of the capital held by the informants. Economic and social structures such as institutions, discourses, fields and ideologies can also play a role in constraining the informant's trading of these capitals. Structures, in Giddens' (1993) terms, can be enabling or constraining to informants in possession of different sets of capital. It is important to point out that none of the informants totally lack any capitals; everybody holds to a certain degree some form of capital. As Skeggs points out it is the perception and recognition of cultural, economic and social capital as legitimate or not that opens or obstructs the path to its conversion to power (1998:8).

Workers

I shall start by analysing each informant's path to their entering the cut flower sector. I will pay attention to their individual stories, analyse their holdings of capital and contrast them to the changes and characteristics of wider structures (institutions, discourses, fields, ideologies). The women workers' stories about their arrival to the sector are set from the 1970s to the early 1990s.

Rosa has been working in cut flowers for almost 30 years now and she explains her entry thus:

My father was with the peasant organisations...and then they had these meetings and we started invading the *haciendas*, we would go with my dad, we would go to take possession of the land bit by bit...and these landlords they didn't even know how much land or cattle they had...they sent the police to us...they would destroy our tents at night and we'd put them up again in the morning...we went on like that until they gave it up and sold the land to the *Incora* [National Institute for Agrarian Reform] and the *Incora* gave us some land but we had to leave anyway, we were forced to leave. I

came here to study and to work. Two years after I came here I got married, and after that I only studied for one more year. I stayed in school until the second year in secondary school in 1974... I had my son and then I had to work and I went to work with the flowers... (Rosa)

As we have seen in chapter 3, in the Colombian rural areas, society tends to be deeply divided between landowners of extensive ranches mainly dedicated to cattle raising; middle-size farms that compete with the ranches for labour and some agricultural and cattle raising technology; and the semi-proletarian peasantry who provide cheap labour to the farms and ranches and cheap food to the urban areas. The struggle for land characterises most of the political conflicts of the 20th century in Colombia (Molano, 1992a and 1992b; Bejarano, 1987).

Rosa's father participated in the agrarian reform struggles of the 1960s and 1970s but as mentioned by Molano (1992a and 1992b) and Pearce (1990) there were no traditional political spaces to legitimise the peasant movement's claims to their rights to improve their standard of living and their position in Colombian society. The lack of space to make the peasant movement's claims heard and to influence the state officials' decision making, obliged them to take direct action in reclaiming the land. These actions gave opportunity to the landowners to argue that the peasant activists were using 'guerrilla' tactics. The landowners tended to have the state apparatus on their side and judges, the police and the armed forces could be used to control the peasantry's claims. The discourses of the landowner classes in the 1960s portrayed trade unionist and peasant leaders' tactics and strategies as typical of the 'guerrillas'. This served to make their claims 'illegal' (Pearce, 1990), to delegitimise them. In this case, a combination of these factors

contributed to Rosa and her family being expelled from the rural areas to the cities.

Azalea and her husband used to manage a farm, without employees, using their family labour to work with cattle and also cultivating potatoes and onions. They also had to migrate to the urban areas. She recalls that: ‘something like 23 years ago we were in a terrible crisis, my husband barely worked and we had lots of children, I had six. We didn’t make a living’ (Azalea). The skills that her husband had, working with cattle and in agriculture, were not easily transferable to the kind of jobs available for men in the periphery of the urban areas, such as in manufacturing. Mostly, the occasional work for him was construction work in Bogotá and as a security guard in the factories; however, this kind of employment tended not to be very stable. She also mentioned a lack of economic capital, such as savings from her former jobs, that would have acted as a safety net. Lack of savings accelerated her decision to look for work in the flower sector. Cut flower work was Azalea’s first paid employment out of the family working unit. At the beginning of the 1980s, cut flower companies were expanding and, contrary to today, they had to attract the women workers when the demand for recruiting new workers was still high.

The structure of patriarchy, in combination with lack of economic capital presents one of the first constraints faced by Amaranta:

When my father died, my brothers were already married and then we were only women at home and then for these guys [owners of farms], knowing that the women are the ones who do all the work, they don’t do business with women [Amaranta’s family were sharecropping land where they cultivated maize and beans]. Then my father died and we had to find another way... the contract was with my father, we did everything and all

the contracts and decisions were taken by him...then when he died, we had to think hard because how could a bunch of only women on their own get work? In the town with all the unemployment what we mostly got offered was work as domestic employees but the wages were a misery... (Amaranta)

Amaranta and the women in her family saw their opportunities to continue working in the traditional agricultural sector reduced when the male 'head' of the family died. Amaranta points out that the women are the ones who do all the work, however, as also happens in other sectors, the cultural capital that women have in the form of knowledge and performance of agricultural work is not valued. Women tend to be seen as 'helpers' in the discourses that see men needing an income to support their families while women do not (Elson and Pearson, 1981).

Dominant patriarchal forms in the rural areas in Colombia tend to allocate to women a domestic role, where women's identity is derived from being part of a family. In Amaranta's case her identity is part of a family working unit, where the men, fathers, brothers and sons, are therefore the 'heads', not only of the family but also of the working unit. A family without a male figure to 'control' and 'be responsible' for the women of the family is seen as problematic and untrustworthy. Her cultural capital in the form of experience in agricultural work was not recognised by the owners of the farms and therefore could not be traded in the labour market in the rural areas.

The only other type of employment available for women 'alone' in the region was domestic employment. However, domestic employment tends to be considered as an extension of the domestic work done by women, and in the

discourses and practices around the gender division of labour it is considered to be of low social status and therefore entitled to little economic reward. (Amaranta has a set of resources, as we are going to see later on in the chapter, that allowed her to 'escape' from what she perceived as the only alternative employment for women available in the rural areas by the time she left).

Holdings of economic capital in Amaranta's family seem to be minimal, since they are having to work in sharecropping without access to land on their own, and this might have played a role in her not acquiring other forms of cultural capital such as education. However, lack of economic capital was not the only reason why she did not engage in further 'formal' education when she was a child:

My father used to say 'even if we have our clothes stitched in pieces, even if we don't have two pairs of shoes, the important thing in life is to eat well' and he didn't give us clothes or was concerned about us studying, nothing like that, everything he got was to be spent on food. My mother used to sell our food to buy us clothes and school books and uniforms, and everything to study. It was funny because he didn't realise how she managed to get all these things for us. She used to take little by little from the beans and maize sacks until she had her own sack and then she would give it to him to sell it in the market in somebody else's name. (Amaranta)

Amaranta's father did not explicitly prohibit or discourage her from attending school but had control over the economic capital of the family, including the wages that the women earned. This control limited the access of the women of his family to other resources. Lack of education is identified by Amaranta as an important constraint on her opportunities in her working life and she has been actively looking to overcome this:

When we arrived from Tolima I promised that once we've arrived I was going to study, I wanted to study, and you know what? I got hooked into this

work [in flowers]...I started to work in the plantations and as such ...I had to do everything... (Amaranta)

Due to a combination of lack of economic capital and a de-legitimation of her cultural capital because of the patriarchal structure dominant in the rural areas in Colombia, employment alternatives for women in the rural areas were scarce and Amaranta's family was forced to migrate to the urban areas near Bogotá. The only other alternative employment for women outside flowers was domestic work; however, Amaranta and her sisters were determined not to work in the type of employment that they had wanted to leave behind in the rural areas, and therefore flowers became their only option for employment. By 1985, the year Amaranta arrived in the municipality near Bogotá, the cut flower sector was expanding rapidly (Leon, 1996) and the companies needed to recruit new workers.

Violeta's previous employment was within domestic service, work characterised by low wages and very hierarchical relationships between employee and employer. She says that she has been working with flowers for 15 years and 'knows them [the companies] all'. At the time of her entry the Colombian economy had not yet been opened to external competition and the cut flower sector had to compete with other industries for labour. Moreover the civil war had not yet displaced millions of people as it was to do from the early 1990s.

Margarita also comes from the rural areas where she worked in domestic employment before she married. There she saved money from her job and when she moved to the urban areas near Bogotá bought a piece of land with her

brother. Together they built the house where she lives now. She was separated from her husband for 12 years and practically raised her children by herself with her mother and sister:

We got married and then we came to live here [near Bogotá]. Then, I continued working, this time in a leather factory... I worked as a shoe painter... and I was there for some time and then the shoe section was closed down and all the women had to leave. Six months after, I came back to the factory but this time to iron the leather and it was different, and it didn't work either because we were very few women. I went back to work for days [domestic employment without contracts] and then I had a kindergarten for four years with the [National] Welfare's [Institute] programme *hogares de Bienestar* [welfare homes]. I left the programme because they delayed the money payments...and I had a new opportunity of going back to work in the same [the leather] company, in the restaurant... I worked there for two years...it was also finished, the company failed completely and they closed it down...there were like 150 employees... it was a disaster because it was a company made of partners, and every partner was taking their share out of the company...[in 1991, 1992]. When I left the company I was unemployed, then I went to work in roses...I have two children, one is 18 and the other 17. I had them already when I had the kindergarten and by then I was also by then separated from my husband....My children were four and three when he left. Then I had to scratch out a living, alone, and I worked some days for daily payment [without contract] and then I had the opportunity to work in flowers... (Margarita)

With the introduction of neo-liberal policies at the end of the 1980s, Colombian manufacturing industries had to compete with cheaper imports. Many factories producing leather, plastics, shoes etc. could not compete without the support of the state in the form of subsidies or credits and they failed. Margarita's history shows that she bore the brunt of these failures, along with many other women workers. The new government policies and programmes of the 1990s were directed towards the promotion of cash crops production for export, such as flowers, bananas and palm oil. Margarita's responsibility for maintaining and raising two children, without support from her husband or immediate family, led her to seek employment in the flower sector, still expanding in the early 1990s.

Supervisors

The supervision level is the next level above the workers in the hierarchy of the *cultivo* and in the classification room. The criteria for appointing supervisors vary from plantation to plantation; in some *cultivos* the management prefer to promote workers from the plantation and in doing so they create competition among the workers in terms of work achievement and loyalty to the company. Other companies prefer to appoint outsiders and preferably people with different cultural capital from the workers, especially in the form of technological university degrees. These will give them some authority/legitimacy when ordering workers around but not so recognised or valued as to compete with the educational credentials of the owners of the *cultivo* (lawyers, engineers, business management). The two supervisors I interviewed belong to the second group.

Jacinto has been a *cultivo* supervisor in several plantations for nine years. Before that he worked with other cash crop exports such as *pitaya*¹ and coffee. By the time he came to work in flowers he was already married and had three children. His wife was working as a secretary in a bank and the family was living with Jacinto's parents in a city in the periphery of the cut flower region:

I studied at technological level, and then I worked with the Agricultural Savings Bank (Caja Agraria)...then I worked in a veneer factory and then I was in a *pitaya* plantation for two years...I left there because as an exotic crop it didn't receive enough attention and they didn't do a lot of research about pest problems and commercialisation...It was a programme brought by Asoexport and the Colombian Association of Coffee Growers as an alternative to some coffee crops that were already placed in marginal zones...They had [the owners] lots of loan credits and then after two years they decided to abandon the plans and to reschedule the debt...After that I went to work in flowers... they didn't pay well but you see, someone with kids and a wife has to have a job. (Jacinto)

Jacinto tells the story of the Colombian Ministry of Agriculture's experiment with export crops that could eventually replace coffee. The exhaustion of the International Coffee Pact at the end of the eighties that had guaranteed some stability in coffee prices around the world, meant that the government had to look for an alternative export crop for the producers. *Pitaya* is one of the crops that the Ministry and the Federation of Coffee tried to promote. Jacinto [and maybe his bosses] reproduces the discourse that lack of state support for research in pest management and commercialisation explained the *pitaya* production failure. However, he might be representing only the manifestation of the policies and not the root of the problem.

The implementation of neo-liberal programmes by the IMF and the World Bank had already determined the international division of production, whereby countries such as the USA [using cheap labour from Mexico], Chile, South Africa, Israel and Spain [using migrant labour from North Africa and South America] had had a head start in fruit production and fruit processing (Morales, 2001, Godfrank 1994). The policies and programmes of the Bank and the IMF tended to protect mostly Northern multinational investment in these countries from competition from emerging economies such as the Colombian economy. The international division of production however, identified cut flowers as one of the crops that might prove successful even though it was not destined to replace coffee production, which has a different social, economic and geographical infrastructure.

Jacinto's educational credentials were only enough for him to trade his skills from the Agricultural Bank to the veneer factory to the *pitaya* plantation, and finally to flower production in unstable jobs, mostly as a supervisor within specific boundaries and easily expendable. Since entering the sector he has worked on several farms for not longer than two years at a time.

The other supervisor, Narciso started working in the flower sector some time before Jacinto. Cut flowers were his first full time employment after having some failures cultivating garlic, lettuce and maize on his family farm. The family had to sell the farm and move back to Bogotá where he started working with flowers:

It was by chance, the same profession had given us some work parameters about working in the agricultural sector and the livestock sector. I studied Business Management, as a technician. I tried to study the whole degree, I did six semesters but then I started working with flowers and the working hours were very long then and I couldn't do both. The least thing I liked were flowers, I liked more the livestock side: chicken, pigs, but *when I started with the flowers it was by chance*, and it was because one day I bought a car and I needed to pay for it and I had a look in the newspaper and it said that supervisors were needed in the production part of the plantation and I didn't have any experience and said to myself I am gonna get experience in flowers. (Narciso – *emphasis added*)

Narciso perceives his entering into the sector as a 'chance.' The need for a job to cover debts turned into his life opportunity. However, what is perceived as a 'chance' might actually be a combination of his holding of capitals and the structural changes in macroeconomic policies by the 1990s Colombian government. He possessed the required cultural capital for the job of supervisor in a *cultivo*, mainly in the form of a technological degree in management, and as a young enthusiastic man who needed the job and wanted to acquire experience in flowers, he also had the mix of naivety and loyalty that, according to Rosa, is expected in a supervisor's profile. He did not need experience in agricultural

work because he was not going to do agricultural work but rather to control and carry out surveillance to ensure that the job was done.

Cultivo owners

In the entrepreneur group we find different constraints that made them turn to the flower business. For William it was his and his partners' failed venture in the greenhouse fruit business that left them facing bankruptcy, but still with enough social and economic capital to continue working in the agricultural sector. He says that:

I came to study university and stayed here [in Bogotá], I stayed here for several years, without knowing really I did a lot of things but I wasn't well placed until some friends offered me to go in the fruit business, growing fruit in greenhouses. The [fruit] business was a total failure and very quickly we were broken ...because they had given us the wrong data and real production was only half of what they had told us, production costs were double and the sale price [of the product] was also half...then we went bankrupt very quickly, in a year we were broken. My partners decided not to continue with the partnership because they didn't want to assume the debt and I was alone, and I had to shift to flowers. (William)

William's failed venture in the fruit business coincided in time, at the beginning of the 1990s, with changes in agricultural export priorities and strategies for the Colombian government, as experienced by Jacinto. The difference is that William was in possession of a different amount of capital than Jacinto to face these abrupt changes in agricultural policies. William since then has become an expert on trade and economy issues in the country and has several publications on the subject; he might be more in the position to influence policies rather than being a 'victim' of them. I will come back to William's case in the section about resources to analyse the set of capitals that he had and how, in spite of being in a debt crisis, he successfully transferred his skills to the flower business.

For Lucie, personal circumstance, the death of her father-in-law, is perceived as the main reason behind her involvement in the flower business. She says that 22 years ago her mother-in-law was widowed and got very depressed. Her husband thought that cultivating flowers on the farm, where the *cultivo* is located now, would help her come out of her depression and he got 200 rose plants for the mother to plant. She looked after them and seeing that the plants and the flowers grew beautifully they continued planting more and seriously asked themselves about expanding this idea into some sort of business. Lucie says that since then they have been cultivating different kinds of flowers.

Lucie works closely with *Asocolflores* in designing and implementing 'conflict resolution' programmes for the workers and other social welfare programmes, to which I will refer in chapter 6. Originally from Australia, she was trained as a psychologist and did post-graduate studies before she went to Colombia. She did not have experience in flowers and she also perceives her entering in the sector as a coincidence.

Constraints for entrepreneurs are relatively fewer than those for workers and managers but still significant when they are placed in the economic and historical context of Colombia and the world, as we are going to see in the section on opportunities and strategies.

Resources

The resources are the different types of capital that every informant had access to before they entered the flower sector. The possession of capital, the lack of it, or

the combination of both, might have influenced the bargaining power of the informants *vis a vis* economic and social structures and determined the position that each informant is occupying now in the hierarchy of the *cultivo*, reflecting the different social and economic positions they occupy in Colombian society. I begin by examining the sets of capital that the women workers were in possession of when they entered the sector.

Workers

In terms of cultural capital, Amaranta counted primary education and experience in agricultural and domestic work. She talks about the capacity to do '*rebusque*' (to do whatever it takes, every kind of job available to survive) and describes how she and her sister used to cook and sell *empanadas*, filled pies similar to *samosas*, outside the cut flower *cultivos* while looking there for jobs. The *rebusque* is seen by Amaranta as a means to an end, to help her in looking for stable employment. Even though her agricultural experience was an asset when doing the cut flower work, it might be regarded as another kind of cultural capital: the general belief that women are 'naturally' apt for work that requires manual dexterity, 'nimble fingers', which influenced her entering into the sector. Contrary to the rural areas, Amaranta was able to trade her cultural capital in the urban labour market and have access to jobs in the cut flower sector.

In terms of social capital she had contacts in the cut flower producer zone through her sister, who told her about the flower companies looking for women workers. She says that:

One lucky thing is that we have always stuck together, the family, and because of that my sister, who had got married and moved to Faca, [short for

Facatativa] and then she told us that there were possibilities for women to find a job in the flowers. (Amaranta)

Margarita perceives her entrance in the sector as an opportunity:

Then I had to fend by myself, I was doing piece work and then I had the opportunity to work with flowers.

How was it?

I went to look for a job, I knew they needed people...I didn't have any idea about flowers, I didn't even know how to handle the scissors, nothing about roses but there was a woman who was working there, and we were friends and she was the one who said: 'come on, look, they are accepting people to work there, they need people' and this was the opportunity. It was for Valentine's Day and at this time of the year one gets hired, with or without experience in flowers. (Margarita)

Margarita's social capital is represented in her friend, who was already working in flowers. Word of mouth that recommends the best companies to work for and the ones to avoid has been an important resource for the women workers in deciding where to work (Meier, 1999). A personal recommendation by a present or former employee was not necessary at the time Margarita got her job but in past years has almost been set as a requisite by companies to hire new workers. It places a responsibility on the person who recommends the worker to vouch for her performance and 'behaviour' as Amaranta and Violeta described. Margarita perceives Valentine's Day as her door into flower employment. However, her previous experience in domestic employment and factory work, which formed her cultural capital, guaranteed that she had the necessary skills to work in flowers with minimal training, an important asset when the company needed workers to start working in a busy season such as Valentine's Day. The busy season acted and still acts as a 'pull' factor in employment in the sector.

Another ‘pulling’ factor has been the minimum wage. Violeta had contacts in the flower companies and she was told that working with flowers would allow her to earn more money than in her previous jobs, mostly in domestic employment. She wanted to work in the cut flower sector because she perceived cut flowers as stable employment where she would earn the minimum wage. At the time she came to work in flowers, the minimum wage was not mandatory in the rural areas. 15 years ago the minimum wage was one of the distinctive aspects of the cut flower sector enabling it to compete for and attract workers. She points out ‘[I came to Madrid] because I was told about the flowers...that one could work and earn more and that the minimum wage and so on, and I don’t know, then one had the illusion of earning the minimum wage’ (Violeta). She is under no such illusion today:

I can’t say I like to work in flowers; nobody is going to say that they like the job. I have to work here because there is nothing else, there are not factories, and if there is work you don’t get it without contacts and there is a lot of unemployment around here, even in flowers, they are not even hiring people like they did before...then you have to look to the other side and work, and work. (Violeta)

Azalea knew about the flower work because her neighbourhood was actively targeted by the flower companies to recruit new women workers. She remembers that:

Then there was a *flora* [a cut flower company] between Chia and Cajicá and it was the Royal Carnation and then a *señor* came around here in a pick up throwing some papers around that said that they needed people in such a flora ...at that very moment we felt very happy and very lucky [laughs] we went, say, to work in a company, we who had never worked in a company before, at least me... (Azalea)

Azalea’s skills in domestic work and agriculture were transferable to the type of work she would do in cut flowers.

Supervisors

In the management area, supervisors tend to share some of the characteristics of the workers but they hold different social, cultural and economic capital. The two supervisors I interviewed are university educated and as pointed out, in the appropriate technological degree preferred for supervisory work in flowers. Jacinto in addition had working experience in the agricultural sector through his previous involvement in a *Pitaya cultivo*. However, he thinks that his social capital, networks and relations, in the form of his friendship with Narciso, who was a friend from university and who recommended him to the management of the company where he was working, was the determining issue in his entry into the sector. He was hired to work in a different *cultivo* but Narciso remained as his mentor and the person responsible for his working performance.

Narciso, on the contrary, did not have contacts in the sector and got his first job through a newspaper advertisement. He considers his cultural capital: the right degree from university, the right attitude towards the hierarchy of the *cultivo*, his enthusiasm, his willingness to learn and his promises of loyalty towards the company, as the main factors in being hired as a supervisor in the *cultivo*. However, these same resources some years later were not enough for Jacinto to get re-hired by the company and he had to resort to Narciso's help and his contacts to get employment in the sector again.

Cultivo owners

The *cultivo* owners and the company entrepreneur tended to have more forms of capital and in more quantity than for example the supervisors or the workers, but

there are also different weights of importance placed on those capitals.

According to William:

It was almost a forced choice because in *La Sabana* de Bogotá there are no more products you can grow in greenhouses...then I took advantage of the existent infrastructure I had for fruit and changed it into flowers. *I landed into this business almost without wanting to do it...* it happened in the year 1990, 1991. We went bankrupt in November, December 1990 and settled the business of our partnership in February, March 1991, from then I continued here. Basically, I didn't want to jeopardise our banking history and because of that I decided to continue with the flower business, to reschedule the debt, to pay it and it has been like that since... then it was an attractive business for the banks, it was the time of the flower growing boom.(William – *emphasis added*)

Economic capital was not mentioned explicitly by the owners of the companies; however, for William, his economic capital is represented in the form of the infrastructure for fruit production and his banking history. His university degree, further research undertaken for publications, knowledge of English, travel and work experience in the fruit venture formed his cultural capital. His social capital took the form of contacts in government through his university colleagues, friends and acquaintances involved in the research of economic issues, and contacts in the banks also through friends and acquaintances. He had enough cultural, social and economic capital to have 'credibility' in front of the banks that agreed to reschedule the debts left from the fruit business. William had the required capitals to transfer his skills from the fruit export business to cut flowers.

Lucie had economic capital in the form of access to land through her husband's family, which owns the land where the flower company is located near Bogotá. Access to land, combined with social capital in the form of contacts through her family and friends, might also have guaranteed her family's access to credit.

Other forms of capital she commands include knowledge of English, her mother tongue, and contacts through the social/economic circle of her husband's family. She did not have initial knowledge of the flower trade or business but had the time, space and money to learn it through experience.

The two company owners then had access to different forms of economic, cultural and social capital through money, land, education, different forms of general knowledge, and contacts. Holding diverse forms and high levels of capital eases the path to the top of the plantation structure.

Opportunities

Through the research of my informants' entries into the cut flower sector, it became apparent that their opportunities depended upon their personal resources coupled with their ability to cash them against the macro level developments of the industry at the time.

Workers

For the workers, the main opportunity was the presence of the industry and the demand for labour of the new *cultivo* owners. In this situation, the workers' cultural and social capital acquired new value with new opportunities for their deployment. The workers with their skills and capitals formed a pool of labour.

The work in the expanding flower industry was considered as an opportunity, a stroke of good fortune by many workers, at least initially. Azalea compares the job she was doing before with cattle with her work with cut flowers. In

comparison with her previous work, she experiences flower work as the opening of a new opportunity:

Working with cattle was harder than flowers. In flowers there are lots of injustices but you don't pay much attention to that at least I got really good friends. I didn't fight with anybody...but working with cattle is more difficult. We had to milk dozens of cows, it was painful, my hands! This pain was like rheumatism because you change from being very hot to put your hands in cold water. More cruel than flowers. We used to start at five in the morning and then it was ten in the morning I wouldn't have finished milking the cows and the bosses wouldn't pay or if they did it was just little by little. I can tell you all about my backache! (Azalea)

Amaranta also compares her previous job with cut flowers:

Flowers? It is wonderful! Because in the rural areas as a woman you don't have time- tables, you have to get up at three in the morning and after you're up you are running. Have a sip of *aguapanela* (brew from solidified sugar cane juice) or a coffee and run to get the cows, come back quickly to grind maize for the *arepas* (a type of bread maize similar to tortillas), and so on and at 10 o'clock at night you are still doing things around the house and you don't have wages. Then when I started in flowers it was marvellous for me, marvellous. We had time to come into work, to leave work, we had our wages and then I felt that I was independent, autonomous because I didn't have to ask anybody for money. And the type of job it seemed easy for me compared to coffee. In coffee you have to collect the beans in a can attached to your waist and a hook to reach the tall bushes, and with the hook you bend the coffee trees and collect the beans, and you have to do everything very quickly, no? Then I thought that flowers were easier. (Amaranta)

Supervisors

For the supervisors the opportunities were increased by their access to education, providing them with the kind of social capital required for the job they needed to perform. However, unlike Amaranta's view that her work in flowers was easier and more rewarding than her previous agricultural work, Narciso does not see any particular benefit in working with flowers over another occupation. On the contrary, this is seen by Narciso less as an opportunity than as 'second best', not what he really wanted. He is measuring the 'opportunity' offered him by the flower industry not by comparing it, as Amaranta and Azalea do, with

experiences of other, even harsher work experiences, but against the hopes and expectations that he had come to harbour as a young man:

I tried to study at professional level, I did six semesters but then I started working with flowers and the hours were very long and therefore I couldn't do both. I would go and fall asleep in class or I had to stay working in the *cultivo* many times and the working hours were from 9 in the morning until three or four in the morning because it was the [Valentine's Day or Mother's Day] season. It was very difficult; either I studied or worked, but at home we didn't have enough money for me to study so I started working with flowers. (Narciso, *my translation*)

Cultivo owners

The opportunities presented to the company owners are those that arise from the macro development of the sector such as the availability of World Bank loans and government support for export-oriented products in the form of tax incentives. Other forms of opportunity are the availability of 'cheap labour' and 'cheap' natural resources.

Given William's knowledge of international trade, and the fact that he already had the greenhouse infrastructure and land, he could make the decision to invest in cut flowers even though he had just gone bankrupt with his greenhouse fruit project. He had enough social, economic and cultural capital to reschedule the debts and start another business. His opportunity was provided by the macroeconomic policy of Colombia to encourage cut flower production for export and he had the necessary capitals to take advantage.

For Lucie, personal circumstances presented an opportunity for her family to enter the sector, but more as a hobby for her mother-in-law in the first instance.

Her family had the capital necessary to make this move, and to expand production into a much more commercial basis thereafter.

The *cultivo* owners perceive their entering the cut flower sector as more of a coincidence, they can trade their social, economic and cultural capitals and enter any other industry. For the workers on the other hand, it is their labour that could mostly be traded; and this labour ('nimble' fingers and 'docile' 'cheap' labour) is only on demand by particular industries such as cut flowers. The supervisors on the other hand, feel confined by their positions and perceive that they need to acquire more capitals to better their working possibilities, not necessarily within the flower sector.

4.2 CYCLES OF PRODUCTION

Cut flower production: a modern industry?

The international division of labour, formally and informally regulated by the market, has ensured that the majority of Southern exports to the North are 'raw materials'. These 'raw materials' get processed into finished commodities in the North, which retains most of the value added. As we have seen before, the production of cut flowers and fruit was one of the answers proposed by the World Bank, the IMF and other development agencies and governments to promote industrialisation and economic growth in some Southern countries. The World Bank and the IMF have also argued that cut flowers, especially, are an industrial product and to produce and process them in their country of origin would mean more revenue for the producing country. A higher share of the final price achieved by the product in the international market is retained within the

country of origin, bringing foreign currency that benefits the exchange rate and debt repayments. Other important aspects highlighted by the above mentioned agencies are the provision of industrial employment opportunities for the population, bringing higher and more stable wages, which, in turn, stimulates the growth of the domestic market.

Industrial production is traditionally associated with assembling many parts or components into one product, the assembly line of automobiles for example, or the transformation of raw materials into a finished commodity through chemical or physical processes, such as sugar or textiles. One feature of the industrialisation of production is the attempt to manage otherwise unpredictable natural conditions such as weather, and minimise the risks and unpredictability of the processes. Another feature is the standardisation of production to ensure that through having the same raw materials or parts, the same methods of processing them and the same rhythms and movements, there is certainty of having standardised products at the end of the process. Industrial production is also part of another dichotomy, wherein it has been opposed to pre-modern systems of production based mainly on manufacturing and agriculture. Industrialisation has been seen as the engine behind the modernisation of societies, transforming feudal and semi-feudal social and economic relations into more 'free', 'autonomous' and 'sustainable' societies within capitalist systems.

Several authors, such as Kalmanovitz (1985, 1987), Palacios and Safford (2001) and Pearce (1990), have described Colombia as a country in a perpetual transition from feudal pre-modern social and economic systems to 'modernity'.

‘Modernising’ systems of production has been one of the main goals of successive Colombian governments since the 1950s and thus has served as the background discourse for the implementation of diverse economic and social policies, such as the neo-liberal policies in the 1990s. Cut flowers have been constructed as the agro-industrial export oriented commodity that marks the transition from ‘backward’ to ‘modern’ industrial forms of agricultural production. *Asocolflores* argues that flower production in Colombia, among its members, is characterised by ‘modern’ forms of production: rational use of resources such as water and land, advanced use of technologies and changing labour relations from pre-modern arrangements such as sharecropping to waged labour.

Cut flower production is seen, therefore, in a very positive light, as one of the ‘modern’ industries that has re-accommodated the international division of labour as the way forward to ‘development’. In addition to the dichotomy of pre-modern vs. modern production, there is another dichotomy involved in cut flower politics, one of legal vs. illegal production. Cut flowers as an industrial export, ‘legally produced’ and bringing welfare and ‘development’, has come to be seen as the clean face of Colombia, in contrast to the production and export of cocaine (Gaitan, 2000). Classifying cut flowers as industrial products in Colombia has added political meanings and implications.

In the next section I am going to analyse how cut flowers are constructed as an industrial product in the discourses used by *Asocolflores* and produced and

reproduced by the owners and supervisors in contrast to the discourses of the workers.

Cut flowers as industrial products

William describes the expectations that the buyers in international markets have about cut flowers:

Why does it have to be so good? Because the knowledgeable customer asks for a high quality product, a high quality product produced under almost industrial standards. When the *gringo* buyers buy a box of flowers they don't want to find surprises, they want to find the same flower, with the same degree of bud opening, the same stem, the same foliage, as if they [the flowers] were industrial products made by machines. (William)

William says that the buyers expect to buy a product that has homogeneous characteristics. However, we need to ask if cut flowers, seen here as industrial products, are in fact the result of industrial processes. To answer the question of how industrialised cut flower production is, I am going to follow the processes required to cultivate a rose. The word cultivation invokes the mediation of a process in the production of the rose but also evokes the mediation of nature.

Production process cycles

Cut flower production is marked by cycles. In the case of the rose, different varieties take different times to produce. The type of soil, temperature and light impact on the length of time that is needed to grow the flower and on the characteristics that the flower will acquire, such as colour, length and strength of stem, foliage, and colour of foliage. Narciso, a supervisor in a *cultivo*, explains in the following quote the diverse lengths of time required to produce different

flowers and also the aims of the flower producers to standardise and control production:

It depends on the variety, because there are varieties that take 65 days and others that take 80. Before there were varieties that took 90 days and this is what the Dutch are aiming at in vegetal research, to have varieties that take a shorter time...if I divide 365 by 65 there are more cycles than when I divide it by 90, then there are less cycles. Then what I need is to produce more flowers to have more money...some people talk about the amount of flowers per plant a year as a tool of measurement...then depending on the variety and also depending on the tendencies of the market, one has to adjust to the varieties that they want... (Narciso)

Knowing this specificity, the cycles are closely programmed during the year to match specific dates such as Valentine's Day and Mother's day.

To prune is to programme the rose plants to...I told you about the cycles, didn't I? Then, you take the sales programme and go to a cycle and prune it. You go to 72, 68 [days before the special occasion], depending on the variety, then you are programming the cycles to more or less hit the peak season [Valentine's Day]. To hit it then you need to have the flower between the 30th of January and the 2nd of February. It is the peak season. Knowing that, you go say 72 days before and prune the plants. In other words what you programme there is the pruning, to have the flower ready for the occasion. (Narciso)

The understanding of a cycle for Narciso, is the period between pruning the rose plant and cutting the flower. His emphasis is on controlling the cycles to achieve more products.

However, Amaranta, a cut flower worker, perceives cycles as the time needed to complete tasks dictated by the needs of the flower plant. She explains that:

We had to do everything...We have to do all these tasks during the day and normally one completes a cycle every fifteen days. Then in these fifteen days you'd have to have everything ready, without weeds, without little buds because if you don't disbud the secondary buds then the stem doesn't grow straight and then after fifteen days it might be too late to cut them. (Amaranta)

While for Narciso the cycle is related to the number of beds producing flowers destined for a specific floral holiday, for the workers, who are in charge of different types of flowers in different stages of production, the cycles are shorter. The length of the cycle is fixed by the tasks required to grow and maintain each type of flower. These short cycles last about 15 days. Whatever the different understanding of the cycle, organisation of production and therefore organisation of labour, is determined by the supervisor's cycles.

Tasks in growing flowers

There are about fifty tasks involved in planting a rose plant, grooming it to the stage of pruning, cutting the flower and then completing all the post-harvesting processes such as classifying, packing, and sometimes labelling. For the purposes of understanding how a rose is produced and how its production is industrialised, I am going to follow the workers' view of the cycle as it offers a more complete description and analysis of the processes required. In the worker's understanding there are some tasks that seem more significant than others and I am going to focus on these tasks to reconstruct the rose production. First, however, we need to have a look at some of the structures of production on the farm, and their insertion within the idea of 'modern' production that encourages the breaking up of former social and economic relations and feudal relations, based on hierarchies of class, gender and 'race'.

Social structure of the *cultivo*

The production part of the farm is divided into two delimited physical spaces: the *cultivo* and the packing room. Depending on the farm, workers generally begin

their work as *operarias* (*cultivo* workers) and either specialise in the tasks of the *cultivo*, or later go on to the packing room. In peak season it is customary on some farms to send the *operarias* to work in the packing room. As Margarita points out:

I had to do it but I wouldn't stay too long, only until ten at night and they would transfer us to the classification room, they'd transfer us because I was a *cultivo* worker and then they would transfer us to the packing room and we'd help more or less until ten at night... (Margarita)

Usually the women workers know how to perform all the tasks in both the *cultivo* and the packing room but many of my informants say that they prefer to specialise in one or the other so they can stay with friends and colleagues they already know. Owners, managers, agronomists, supervisors and male *operarios* can circulate between these two spaces while women workers tend to be restricted to their work zones. Male *operarios* act as bridges between these two women's worlds. They carry the flowers from the *cultivo* to the packing room by hand or with wheelbarrows, or push the flowers along conveyor belts.

The farm and the *cultivo* have a tight hierarchy of owners, technical staff, clerical and administrative staff, managers, supervisors, monitors and workers. The hierarchy of command goes from the top, from the owners to the managers, the managers to the supervisors, and from the supervisors to the monitors and workers. Workers are seldom in contact with the manager of the *cultivo* or the owner and not even supervisors have direct contact with owners in most cases.

Narciso, a supervisor, talks about the contact that he has with his bosses:

I saw him [the owner of the *cultivo*], I've seen him passing by. He goes and checks on the farm and you know that he is the owner but I don't have direct contact with him, no I don't... basically I have contact with the manager of the farm, with the agronomist, with the technical manager and

with the chief of personnel. Nobody else. Sometimes we know that the business partners are visiting the farm, that the boss is there, or the President of the company...but they never... not with the people either [the workers], they pass by and watch their business, they only talk there to the manager. The only contact I have in the *cultivo* is with the people [the workers] and my immediate boss, who is, if you are in the *cultivo*, the agronomist, and if you are in the packing room or post harvest room it is the chief of the packing room. (Narciso)

The social world on the farm, as seen above, is very hierarchical. It reflects broader class divisions in Colombia, and also reflects all the tensions between labour and capital whereby capital constructs labour as inefficient and unreliable and therefore in need of control more than stimulus to ensure success in the production of cut flowers. William gives us his opinions about the workers as follows:

And then, in flowers you find reflected all the problems of an underdeveloped country. You have to deal with all the things... industries located in the cities don't have big supplying or public services problems but as you know, in the rural areas public services don't...when you have them, their provision is really irregular. You have to deal with all the inefficiencies of the public entities that take part in this trade: environmental regulation offices, tax offices, customs, exports, everything is a disaster. You have to deal with a labour force that in its big majority, not to say all, comes with a peasant culture, with a peasant mentality.

What do you mean?

With a mentality that is not used to perform industrial tasks. In flowers, for you to be able to grow some flowers, for you to be a reliable supplier of cut flowers you have to operate under standards and routines that the peasants are not ready...they are not used to follow, to do. The Colombian peasants are used to improvise, they do what comes! They do what they have to do for today and then to change this mentality of improvisation to the planned things, to the normalised processes is not easy! It isn't easy! You have to fight against this culture, you have to transform them into rural operatives. (William)

Cycles and tasks

For analytical purposes the overall duties of the farm could be divided into those concerned with the construction and maintenance of infrastructure and those

cyclical tasks that involve direct work with the flowers. The management, construction and maintenance tasks are, for instance: ownership/renting of the land and credits/banking procedures decided and carried out by the owners; the selection of types and classes of flowers to produce and planning the tasks to be performed during the cultivation cycle, decided by the owners and the technical staff; labour recruitment done by the management, supervisors and owners; analysis of soil, water, rainwater, pests and selection of fertilisers, pesticides, water irrigation done by technical staff; ploughing the land with tractors and the building of the temporary infrastructure of the greenhouses as well as permanent infrastructure such as offices, restaurant, toilets, packing room, cooling storage room, carried out in the majority of cases by male labourers.

The cycle of cut flower production relies heavily on manual labour. Most of these tasks cannot be mechanised and require high levels of dexterity, concentration and decision making. Working hours in a *cultivo* could extend from 6-7 a.m. until 3-3:30 p.m. and during peak season in the packing room they could go around the clock for months, as stated by Margarita:

There are many harvesting times: Mother's Day, weddings in November or just different occasions, especially for Valentine's Day. For Valentine's, already the 15th [of February the day the interview took place] is finished but around December, January there in the roses *cultivo* there were many times that the people from the classification and packing room would spend the whole night packing the roses and then the next day they would go and change their clothes and continue packing. The whole time, a month, a month and a half, they would allow them to go to sleep every third day. (Margarita)

The cycles carry on regardless of the buying season, whether it is peak season such as Valentine's Day or the days in between peak seasons. Nevertheless, peak seasons seem to be regular events in the cut flower industry if we follow the

floral holiday calendar for the year 2000 that *Asocolflores* has on its web page (see Table 4.1 overleaf).

The construction of the production of flowers as seasonal has implications for the way that the labour force is hired and fired, as we are going to see elsewhere in this chapter. However, briefly I need to note that production for export needs to be almost continuous to fulfil the demands of countries like the USA, where demand even in terms of holidays seems to be regular all year around, without even taking into account weddings, birthdays, funerals, births, religious services and personal and business consumption.

Table No. 4.1
Floral holiday calendar for the year 2000

Fiesta	2000
USA	
Valentine's Day	February 14
St. Patrick's Day	March 17
First day of Passover	April 8
Easter	April 15
Secretaries Day	April 23
Mother's Day	May 13
Memorial Day	May 28
Independence	July 4
Labor Day	September 3
Rosh Hashana	September 18
National Flower Week	September 23 – 29
Sweetest Day	October 20
Thanksgiving	November 22
Habukkah [sic]	December 10
Christmas	December 25
Other Countries	
New Year Japan – Russia	January 1
Adults Day Japan	January 8
Valentine's Day	February 14
International Woman's Day	March 8
Ohigan (beginning of spring) Japan	March 18 – 24
Mother's Day – England	March 25
Labor Day – Germany – France – Spain	May 1
Mother's Day Spain –	May 6

Luxembourg	
Victoire France – Russia	May 9
Mother’s Day Japan – China- Germany- Holland – Italy	May 13
Last Day of School Russia	May 25
Mother’s Day France	May 27
Father’s Day Japan	June 17
School Day Russia	June 22
Independence France	July 14
Shinbon (all souls day) Japan	July 13 – 16
Valentine’s Day China	August 6
Obon – Japan	August 13 – 16

Source: *Asocolflores*, 2001a

In the following part I am going to follow the fifteen day cycle, according to the description and analysis of the tasks done by workers and supervisors. The workers’ account is privileged but the managers’ and owners’ cycles are taken into account as they impinge on the workers’ experience.

Cyclical tasks

We will start with planting the rose plant. Margarita points out that in general work ‘starts at six thirty then at eleven we’d have lunch and at half past eleven we’d go back to work. We’d finish at three in the afternoon’ (Margarita). Rose bed preparation, which includes the elevation of the level of the bed, the measurement and marking of the bed location and excavation and elevation of area and soil preparation, would have already been done, mostly by men, some time before. Narciso explains how, as part of his training to become a supervisor, he had to learn all the tasks assigned to male workers, ‘I did the *cultivo* tasks as I was an *operario*, a worker. I had to dig, to prepare the beds to plant the plants, to mark the beds, to knit the strings, where you knit the strings between the plants to make them grow very straight up’(Narciso).

After preparation, the beds are allocated to the women workers by the supervisors. Sometimes the day of allocation of beds coincides with the first days for new recruits who have been hired to replace *operarias* fired some days before. The allocation of beds does not necessarily mean that all of them are new beds for planting; beds could be at any stage of production. Amaranta says that in her first day of work they ‘first allocated us the beds’. The workers’ cycle refers to the individual flower beds rather than to any 15-day cycle. From what they say, each worker is typically in charge of several beds, each at a different stage in its 15-day cycle. If we follow a worker through a single day, or indeed a 15-day cycle marked by the allocation of a new bed, then what she would do would be very variable, according to the stage in the cycle of each of the beds under her charge. Therefore, the daily/fortnightly pattern of work would not be uniform, and nor would it follow the 15-day cycle of any single bed.

Following the allocation of beds and depending on the progress of their beds, if they are ready for cutting, the first task in the morning would be to remove the rubber bands that had been wrapped around the bud the afternoon before and to cut the flowers and carry them to the points of collection in the *cultivo*. The following tasks would be to clean the working space and then to move to other beds where the *operaria* performs tasks such as planting, disbudding, knitting, weeding, etc.

If the beds are in the planting stage, the *operaria* needs to kneel down or bend down to dig the holes, mix soil from the hole with fertilisers and put half of it back, then to place the rose bush in the half filled hole and spread out the roots

evenly to ensure that they are covering evenly within the feeding space. Then, she needs to fill the hole back with the remaining soil and move on to the next space. Planting needs to be done in the early hours of the morning when the temperature is still low, therefore it is a task that should be planned not to clash with cutting days, since cutting also has to be done early in the morning. In the morning the temperature could be very low, when the day progresses, however, temperatures rise as Margarita explains:

We would come at six thirty in the morning and the cold! Because the plastic stores the cold [from the night], the ice, and mostly in December, [it is] very dreadful, cold! They have to set fires otherwise the plants would be burnt with the cold. But from ten in the morning if it is too hot you could faint. (Margarita)

Irrigation is done mostly by men, although Azalea remembers that ‘...sometimes we had to spray the plants too. We had to spray...we had to get the hose pipe and spray, one person would carry the hose pipe to spray the plants and the other person would help pull it to keep it from getting tangled [with the plants]’ (Azalea). The next task during the day would be knitting to make the baskets that guide the direction that the flower plant grows. Rosa explains how the knitting works:

To knit the baskets, it is... I say, here it is the flower bed and this here has [these little strings between the plants], then you have to knit like a net around the plant and to put all of the little plant within the little squares that you have knitted with the strings and then you continue knitting, you can imagine that, and all the branches that are loose you need to put them back inside the net. When they are loose you need to untie everything and to knit the net again’. (Rosa)

It is a task that has changed over time. Twenty years ago, Azalea tells us, it was a more specialised and predominantly male task: ‘I didn’t have to knit the strings [to make the nets that go around the plants] very often because they had another

group of male workers who did that' (Azalea). In some *cultivos* today, moreover, knitting has passed from being a specialised task done by hand to an industrialised task done by machines in the North and then imported into the country. Violeta says that: 'I have to do everything. Everything apart from knitting the strings because they have these ready made nets, now everything is with ready made nets but apart from that I have to do everything' (Violeta). Narciso explains why the task might have changed:

Knitting, we don't do that anymore, we have now this Spanish net that you place at the beginning, when the plants are small, and the only thing you have to do is to put it up when the plants are growing. Then the labour that used to knit and make the baskets you don't need them anymore, it is cheaper to put the net. (Narciso)

After every task there is the need 'to clean everything in the morning and in the afternoon' (Amaranta). Cleaning means removing spilled soil and dug up weeds, raking and sweeping the soil.

When the plants are growing the efforts are concentrated in nurturing a main bud, therefore the *operarias* need to check for side buds and remove them in a process called disbudding. Margarita says that:

My first job was disbudding, to remove the additional buds [in the plant]. You keep pulling the little buds forming around the plant, additional to the main ones, then they grow stronger...they are like little shoots that grow from the stem of the rose...if you don't do that then the stem and the bud will grow very thin. (Margarita)

It is a task that needs to be done once to every plant during the 15 day cycle throughout every bed:

...then every [working] day is spent removing buds and removing more buds until at the end of the fifteen days you have everything updated. And when you finish all your beds then it is time to start all over again. It is something so permanent that it turns out to be a routine, then if one adopts a

good rhythm it finishes in two weeks and then everything starts again.
(Amaranta)

Disbudding also allows the women workers to check on the health of the plant, to look for the presence of pests, to evaluate the need for further fertilisation and to reschedule watering programmes based on the colour of the leaves and the bud. It is also a task that permits measurement of the development of the plant itself and the evaluation of the need for further support for the plant.

Other tasks are cultivation, mulching and weeding which are also performed once every fifteen day cycle. The spraying of pesticides is carried out mostly by men and is routinely programmed as a preventive measure against the proliferation of pests or as a result of tests that have shown the presence of specific pests.

Another task that allows women to check on the health and progress of the plant is the pruning and the placing of rubber bands around the buds, and these are also time consuming tasks. The women workers explain that 'in the afternoon we have to start again with the rubber bands. To put a rubber band around each bud to allow them to open very perfectly and let's say to do everything that has to do with the growing of the plant very straight' (Amaranta). The rubber bands are only needed overnight to hold the petals of the flower and to delay its flowering until it is ready to be cut. In the morning the bands are removed again, one by one: 'in the mornings I had to do, first thing in the mornings, I had to start removing the rubber bands from the buds, the ones that I had put on the day

before and then in the afternoon to go and continue removing the spare buds from the stems and also I had to do the weeding' (Azalea).

Working in the greenhouses means working under special conditions regarding temperature, air and humidity. Margarita for example says that 'we have to wear these boots the whole day, and the sun, it burns my face...I have much back pain because of the sun...I felt the skin on my back burning, as in a barbecue, a very strong pain' (Margarita).

During the cutting season workers are moved from their cyclical tasks to do the cutting and packing and companies also hire additional workers, as Violeta explains:

Mostly they hire people for cutting the flowers. Yes, for the maintenance of the beds and we, the women are for cutting the flowers out, men are for repairs, for repairing the plastics, for the [packing] room, for the freezer, to carry the flowers or to pull the containers with flowers through the tracks. (Violeta)

Narciso explains that hiring and firing workers is a strategy that the farms use:

[During the cutting season] you just hire temporary workers and it has always been like that because a farm can't afford to have this amount of workers working permanently. This year for example everybody had hired workers for the Valentine's cutting, then the ice came and a lot of farms had to get rid of the workers because they didn't have flowers, so what were they going to cut? (Narciso)

This suggests that in spite of the 'evening out' of the calendar cycle by production for the international markets, there is still a definite period in which cutting occurs. Otherwise there would always be some beds that were ready for cutting and cutting would be transformed from a cyclical task to a regular daily task.

Cutting roses is a demanding task: 'my first days were dreadful, dreadful [she laughs] because in the roses I had scratches everywhere, my face, my legs, my arms, because you keep cutting the roses and then you hold them in your arms and of course you scratch yourself...' (Margarita).

The equipment given to the workers sometimes is not very adequate: 'as a cutter they'd give me thick leather gloves but with these gloves I wasn't capable of handling the pair of scissors then I would wear rubber gloves but with them every day it was a new pair of gloves!' (Margarita).

Another aspect of the cutting season is the temperature that has to be maintained in the greenhouses. Margarita explains why:

In harvesting times they don't open any curtains. There are several curtains where you fold the plastic up to air the greenhouses and at night we pull them down. But at harvesting time it is necessary for the flower to receive all the heat it needs to raise, to open, then they wouldn't open any curtains, they don't allow the air to come through, everything is closed, everything is sealed and the heat is awful...with the heat the smell of pesticides is stronger, especially at harvesting time. (Margarita)

The demand for flowers in foreign markets determines the supervisor's cycles and the production for Christmas and Valentine's Day and other annual holidays intensifies the workload for women workers. The workload, however, seems to have been continuously increasing, as Narciso explains:

Before, we could have... in carnation production that is the flower I have more experience with, we used to have more or less 16 workers per hectare, including post harvest. That was before, right now we are at ten and even less. There are companies that have even less people; now with the use of hydroponics it is much less people. (Narciso)

The companies can have fewer people per hectare because they are asking for more productivity from the workers. Amaranta explains that 'first we had to cut 150 flowers per hour, after a probation period then it was 300 and then it increases to more than 450 in the hour' (Amaranta).

The issue of contracting temporary workers only for the cutting season, as stated by Narciso above, is disputed by Violeta. She works through the *contratista*, an intermediary middleman who hires workers to work in the company. The companies then have fewer permanent employees and hire out workers who do the permanent jobs on a temporary basis. Violeta comments that:

Productivity? We, the ones who are with the *contratista*, they ask more productivity from us. We have to be very efficient, we need to cut 400 per hour in carnations and we have to disbud three beds a day, because my beds are producing a lot then I have to disbud but they also take us to go and plant the new plants and at the same time they tell us that we can't have that as an excuse for not having the beds ready. That we have to plant but also we have to look after the beds we already have, and then I think how am I going to be there planting and at the same time to be with the beds, disbudding? (Violeta)

The companies, as stated by Narciso above, get rid of the workers once the cutting and packing is over. Violeta says that:

After Valentine's, a week ago, on Saturday they fired ten women. They say that since Valentine's is over then there are too many people and because we start planning then there are too many people. They leave the most efficient, they don't think that everybody needs the job, they don't think who needs the work most, they just think what is best for themselves. My *compañera*, who came to the *cultivo* at the same time as me, they fired her and another three with her. The boss told her that the company had ordered him to get rid of people who have less productivity. (Violeta)

The form of contracting workers, such as using a middleman as an intermediary, allows the companies to rotate the workers, as explained above by Violeta.

Amaranta also tell us that:

I started working with them [the company] but I worked with the *contratista*, it means one works for the company but they don't ask for any documents, nothing, there in the company there were young women and girls, they were 12, 13, 17 years old, without documents. I was the eldest of the group and I was 17 then, and then we had to do everything and we were working with the *contratista*. I didn't sign anything, the company didn't have anything to do with us it was the *contratista* who paid us. (Amaranta)

During most of the time workers find themselves in charge not only of their working routine in trying to complete their cycle but also having to do cutting, classifying and packing of flowers. Sometimes they also have to work piling up the boxes of flowers in the cold storage room. Violeta says that 'I have to do everything. Cutting the flowers...' and Margarita has also seen her workload increased by cutting and packing 'I was in the packing room but very little. When there is peak-harvesting time, like Valentine's Day, for example' (Margarita).

Training and responsibilities assigned to the workers

This 'industrialised' work process is by no means, then, a 'Fordist' one, whereby each worker performs only one highly specific task. The women workers do all the above mentioned tasks after only a few days of training. Training however seems to be an important part of constructing cut flowers as an industrial product:

Training, training, training and training... the knowledgeable customer asks for a high quality product, a high quality product produced under almost industrial standards...therefore, you have to deal with these peasants to make them change their mentality and achieve something more than mere improvisation. (William)

However, the training that William so highly values and emphasises here, as central in changing 'the peasant mentality' to achieve efficiency in cut flower

cultivation, in practice does not seem to occupy the same priority. The experiences of women workers with training have been rather few. The maximum number of days that the informants listed as being spent in training the first time they came to work with flowers was three. Further training during the time they have spent working in the *cultivos* was not mentioned. Azalea talks about her experience with training:

And who taught you the work?

When we came to work there they would put a person to teach us. *A worker as well?* A worker or the boss we had, very nice person, he would come and teach us everything. The only thing is if one didn't learn at the second or third time you're lost because there was no more time to learn. But people learnt easily and went to work. (Azalea)

Margarita's training experience was not very different from Azalea's:

And who would tell you how to do the tasks?

Ah, there was a supervisor.

And the supervisor would teach you?

He would teach me, I was taught that for three days. Let's say, they first say, they say what one has to do, and so on and for the three days they were on my back: 'do this, don't do this, it is like that' and so on: 'be careful because you can twist the flowers', and so on. After three days they left me on my own, to fend for myself. That's how I started... then to pick up the weeds, to cut the flowers, to arrange the banks, because they have a string to keep the leaves inside and to make everything look tidy. (Margarita)

Amaranta also talks about the nature of the training she received at the beginning. It seems however, that it was equally about learning the discipline, rules and regulations of the *cultivo* as it was about the ways of performing the tasks.

When you arrived, did you have some experience in the work?

First of all they explained to us and then they would come and check on the work, first about the cutting, cutting out all the flowers which were ready to be packed, then the measurement, then when it is not measurement then it is to count the little knots of the stem, because all these little knots are

really important, and so on, the way you handle the flower is also important, everything like that and from there you just carry on. (Amaranta)

In the middle of the hierarchy of the *cultivo*, one of the supervisors, Narciso, considers that training for the workers guarantees efficiency in their work performance and the absence of proper training could turn out to be expensive to the companies:

You see I started the training showing people everything that has to do with the thickness of the stem, the quality of the leaf bud, the height of the plant then the person has to be trained to understand, to manipulate the pair of scissors. They need to know how to make decisions, and this is one of the things I most insist on: I say that the people who make more decisions in the company are not the manager or the owner but the workers. A worker who cuts 300 flowers per hour is taking 1500 decisions in the day of cutting. If the worker is pulling off excess buds she has to take another 1500 decisions and there are more if the worker continues with the net work. That is where we need to direct all our efforts to be sure that things are done correctly because a bad decision made by them could be very costly for the company. (Narciso)

This appreciation of the workers' skills comes with the responsibility that is placed in their hands after only a few days of initial training and no further training afterwards. This responsibility is internalised by the workers. Azalea says:

And in the afternoon [we have] to put the rubber bands back onto the buds to keep the flower from opening the next day, because if it was too open they wouldn't buy it, neither if it was too closed, it was just a waste then. Then with a couple of flowers, with few flowers that we wasted it was a loss for the company... (Azalea)

Regarding the supervisor's training, Narciso's recollections suggest that it tends to be longer than that received by the workers:

And what did you have to do, what did they tell you to do?

They told us about the *labores culturales* (*cultivo* tasks) and personnel management. They gave us an induction that lasted for more or less a month where I did the *cultivo* tasks as if I was an *operario*, a

worker...After that, one would be allocated to the working areas and then I applied what I had been learning in this month of training and then to put it into practice controlling the times and movements of people. Basically I was like an overseer. (Narciso)

It is interesting to pull out the implications of this 'on the job' training received by the supervisors. In effect, the supervisors receive their training in the work processes by the workers themselves (presumably without the workers receiving any additional payment for training their future supervisor).

As we have seen there are different ideas of training. The need for training as stated by William is to change the worker's 'peasant' mentality into an 'industrial' mentality; and to change from 'pre-modern' into 'modern' practices and discipline. According to Narciso, the worker has to be properly trained, to assume her responsibilities, because she needs to make several decisions that in the end will affect the company. In reality however, instead of an organised programme where the worker would learn the tasks and be given the tools to achieve them, and further opportunities to revise her learning processes from time to time, it was expected that she would learn from experience, looking at other workers, repeating the tasks several times and improvising; as Margarita says 'to fend for myself'.

Training seems to be equated with practising rather than with tutoring, and from this type of training the worker is expected to achieve 'industrial' standards. But the discourse of training as an investment in workers' futures ('modern' not feudal) and the plantation's success is perpetuated by the owners and managers.

Control and surveillance

The above mentioned tasks are repetitive, strenuous and impact on the standard of living of the workers. Lack of training, the social structure of the *cultivo* and the types of tasks, sometimes set the women up in competition with each other.

Amaranta and Violeta tell us about their experiences when they first started working with flowers. According to Amaranta:

When I started working and I was new the old ones wanted to take advantage of me and they wanted me to do everything for them. I used to fight a lot when I was at home and now there, in the *flora*, I continue fighting. Firstly because we were only two single women in the section and not only single but we didn't have children either. And then everybody was very amazed: 'and how is that? Why don't you have children?' and so on and we were very young and then everything started, all the problems with the older *compañeras*: 'go and sweep there, pick this rubbish there'. We had our beds and in addition to them we had to do whatever they wanted us to do. The first days I thought it was normal, everybody ordering me around and then I started noticing that the others would do their tasks themselves. Then the next morning I came and I started doing my own things and when one of the women shouted at me 'hey you haven't picked my rubbish up!' I just said 'ah really and why is that? Is that because you can't bend your knees and do it yourself?' and then we started the fight with these women. I went to see the supervisor and asked him in front of everybody to tell me who was in charge and who was giving orders and they got really, really angry. (Amaranta)

And for Violeta:

You see, when you arrive at the beginning they really want to take advantage of you because you are with the *contratista*. That's pure ignorance, they think they are better than us and at the end after they have seen us for a long time they change and became just *compañeras*. At least in my case I don't fight with anybody and I don't pay attention to them...for example, there is one who is Evangelical, who's a Christian, and she says that since Christians only hang around with Christians then she looks down at us, the ones who are not. Then she stays meters away from us, if I ask her something and she doesn't answer and all of that and she is supposed to be a Christian and a saint! (Violeta)

There are several strategies used by the companies to ensure that in spite of the working conditions the workers are kept under control. Segregation and

compartmentalisation form parts of the mechanisms in place to control workers but also supervisors and monitors. Down the line, direct control of the workers is exercised through the supervisors and their monitors, as Jacinto illustrates:

Lunch time starts at eleven in the morning, in shifts, from eleven to eleven thirty, half an hour for lunch, from eleven thirty to twelve, and we have the last shift, we all [the supervisors] meet at lunch time, all the supervisors. But of course while we are having lunch there are people there [in the *cultivo*] checking, we have monitors. We have to control...to see that things are done...because we [the Colombians] are used to being told to do things otherwise we wouldn't do anything. (Jacinto)

There are different instruments used to ensure the control of the management over the workers.

Sometimes they promote workers to be supervisors. At least the one who was disciplined, the one who helped to finish the union, this one got promoted. She is a newcomer and only studied up to fifth grade in primary school and she came and spoilt everything, she harms the organisation and after all this when she needed us she came and told us 'that she had been disciplined and this and that and that what was she supposed to do now?' and I told her 'you know what? Go to the Ministry of Labour and file a complaint'. She wasn't a union member, she was against the union. When she was a worker [*operaria*] she was a member but for a little time and then she got promoted. She became our enemy when she got promoted to General Supervisor and she used to court people and tell them that we stole the worker's money. That this money we collected for the union, the quota, we'd used it to decorate our houses, to dress smart, to go out for lunches, to go out with friends and to go out dancing. We were going to sue her but we didn't do it to avoid more problems. (Rosa)

The same workers are therefore used to control their *compañeras*. The companies might use either fear and discipline or rewards, but mostly a combination of these, to get information about the movements of the workers. Personal information is sometimes used to control workers. Jacinto explains that:

They [the workers] would tell us, the people [workers] they would tell us 'listen *don* Jacinto, there was a meeting...' and so and so, they would tell us everything. And what can we do? Just to report it to my immediate boss, who is the manager of the *cultivo*, and he would tell the managing board. (Jacinto)

Jacinto also explains the rewards that the worker gets when denouncing their *compañeras*:

It is voluntary on their part [the workers], but we take it into account for a permit [for medical appointments, issues related to children's school, relatives health, among others] ... or something else. One of the bases that every employee should take into account is to be loyal to the company. We [the supervisors] also have to be loyal to the company...in writing the reports and these things...when there is any news and news like they had a meeting in block x and they talked about the formation of a union and that they wanted to change the manager because he doesn't authorise more overtime or because he paid five pesos less or something like that we have to report that. (Jacinto)

Once the supervisor has information about the workers there is a gradual system of warnings and punishment:

The more immediate measure that the management takes is to call the *señor* or *señora* and give them the written warning and if it continues, to give them more and more written warnings until they complete three and then to kick them out of the company...with three oral warnings or three times that they come late, the company takes a day of payment from their salary...In flowers there are very strict internal rules, such things like stealing flowers, or to make wrong cuts, everything has a consequence. For example, if somebody is told to cut in star style and they cut more open then there in the classification room they would know who did it because they can recognise everybody's canvas and therefore this person is failing in her cut and she deserves her warning...the company starts discounting from her salary. There are a lot of repressive measures and this is what people don't like. (Jacinto)

Another form of control is the construction of labour as casual labour which reduces the opportunities for unionisation. Widespread unemployment in Colombia ensures that the companies have an available and ready pool of skilled labour:

Now they haven't allocated the beds because we are still planning, then they haven't had time to allocate the beds. When they allocate the beds there will be an excess of people and they will continue firing the workers and again and again. Until they need people again and they will take people in again. Mostly they hire people for cutting the flowers. (Violeta)

Among the systems used by the companies is subcontracting labour through individuals or companies. The *contratistas* hire the women workers to work for days, earning only their wages and in some cases without health insurance or benefits. Violeta explains:

I am with a *contratista* (middleman, broker) and with the *contratista* we don't have subsidies and the lunch vouchers cost 1700 pesos. If I was working with a contract with the company it would cost me 1000 pesos... The company's doctor rejected me because I have varicose veins. But with varicose veins and everything I am good enough to work with the *contratista* but not for the company and we have to do the same things for the same company. What I can't believe is that there are people working here for more than a year with the *contratista*, and they can have varicose veins, high blood pressure, hernias, surgeries, caesareans, etc. and they can't be hired by the company but they can be hired by the *contratista* and then work for the company! We have health [insurance] but not the subsidies, and the other thing is that the *contratista* can fire us at any moment whereas when you are hired by the company they can't. (Violeta)

In this way the company could argue that they do not have any direct link with the worker and therefore no direct responsibilities and obligations for her:

No, I didn't sign anything, I was with the *contratista* and then the company didn't have anything to do. It was the *contratista* who paid us and I started to distrust them when they paid us in a little office in Madrid and they paid us through a very little window. They would call any of us, then a hand came out and gave the money out to the person and then slam! Closed again! When I counted the money there was less money than it was supposed to be and then to whom could we complain? We went to complain to the company and they'd say: 'no, everything is all right'. Until one time that they paid us the wages in four instalments, fifteen days work in four instalments. We had to go there, to the little window, every week to ask for this little amount of money, we'd spend more money on bus fares than the amount they paid us, everybody from Faca, El Rosal, and even Subachoque, everybody had to go to Madrid. (Amaranta)

Summary and conclusion

The first part of this chapter considered the entry into the cut flower sector of various actors. It is notable that women workers do not see themselves as 'victims'. They consider that they exercised a certain degree of decision making

power when entering the sector, for example, choosing not to work in domestic employment, seeking specifically work in cut flowers because it was the main agricultural job in the region that had the minimum wage by the end of the 1980s. Other factors that contribute to them not accepting themselves as ‘victims’ may be the direct or indirect involvement in unions and organisations addressed in chapter 6.

The women informants first came to work in the flower industry between 1974 and 1992, which coincides with the expansion period in the sector. Initially cut flower companies had to compete with other settled industries and the availability of a pool of female labour was crucial. This labour was made available by migration from the rural areas to the urban areas, as in the case of Azalea. The lack of structural reforms in the rural areas of Colombia such as agrarian reforms and access to credit meant that gender roles that held women in unpaid family labour and poor education and health provision all accelerated the rural to urban migration that made thousands of women available to work in the cut flower industry. Personal circumstances were perceived as the motor behind the turns of fortune that led to some of the respondents becoming involved with flowers. Entry to the industry is perceived in terms of ‘chance’, but there is a pattern which emerges when their narratives are analysed in terms of resources, constraints and opportunities. For example, Lucie or her mother-in-law would not have been able to plant 200 plants if they did not own land near Bogotá. William could not have successfully shifted to cut flower production without the legitimisation of his cultural capital in the form of a university degree, experience in agricultural export work, and his social capital in the form of

contacts with family and friends in government and financial institutions. Women workers mainly use their social capital to get access to employment in the cut flower sector via family networks, friends and neighbours. In an increasing number of cut flower companies, new women workers need to be recommended by a former or current worker or supervisor, who is then made responsible for the general behaviour of her/his friend or relative.

Women find it difficult to get some forms of their cultural capital recognised, for example working experience in the rural sector and in the household. Other forms, such as their perceived gender attributes ('nimble fingers', docility, fidelity) facilitate more their selection as workers. The bargaining position of women workers tends to be weak because they have few employment alternatives and they need work for themselves and their families.

The cultural, economic and social capital of the entrepreneurs need to be seen in two contexts, the individual and the family, within the wider context of the society. Before the individual can access the social and economic capital of the family, he/she might be obliged to display capital in the service of family holdings. The individual might need to achieve certain educational, work experience and cultural skills and form their own [heterosexual] family in order to benefit the extended family and kin. Once they have done that they are able as an individual to draw on the economic, cultural and social resources of the family. This then allows the validation of their social capital (and credibility) by family relations and kin networks, and the validation of their economic capital, represented by assets such as land and other properties, by financial institutions.

Their social capital determines their access to schools and universities which guarantees that their educational knowledge is highly valued. They are trained in certain exclusive Colombian universities and/or in overseas universities, and educational credentials open the door for strategic job placements in the private and public sector. In turn, work experience, university contacts and family contacts determine their access to economic resources such as state backed development credits and private banking credits.

The entrepreneurs have social capital which may give them access to restricted economic information in the hands of government, better preparing them to respond to changes in the international markets. Their social capital may also facilitate direct lobbying of government to ensure favourable legislation for their industries, as for example, the 1993 labour legislation reform in Colombia. Their high levels of holdings of various forms of capital place entrepreneurs at the top of the plantation hierarchy, just as they are at the top of the Colombian society with the power to determine salaries, working conditions, discipline codes, and values. Power over the workers even extends outside the plantations through the confidentiality clause in the worker's contract.

The second part of the chapter looks in detail at the cycles of cut flower production according to the various actors. It begins with the owner's narrative, describing their aim to produce an industrial product, and I investigate to what extent this is the case. It is certainly not on a Fordist model, with workers who would specialise in very specific tasks that they repeated over and over again. The women report a wide range of duties, variable from day to day although with

definite discernible rhythms. However there are clear tendencies towards a uniform product, the output of which can be manipulated to meet peaks and troughs in demand in an attempt to impose an industrial cycle of production on a natural cycle of production (the growing and flowering of a rose).

Considerable technology is deployed in the industry, but it is little used by the women workers. Their work is manual, requiring dexterity, speed and judgement. It is also subject to discipline and control, if not of the assembly line then of quotas, quality control and divide and rule tactics. Arguably there are also elements of a post-Fordist model, with sub-contracting providing a flexibilisation (and a 'cheapening') of labour.

Despite the emphasis placed by owners and managers on training, in reality it is minimal and what is referred to as training might be better described as disciplining and controlling the labour force. The women workers achieve what they do on the strength of the agricultural skills and judgement that they bring to the *cultivos* and by learning from one another. The quality and competitiveness of the Colombian flower sector, that claims to have brought modernity to the peasants, has in fact been achieved on the backs of women workers. However, women workers have not been spectators or victims of this transition but have organised and resisted for many years, as we will see in chapter 6.

The combination of the two parts of the chapter highlights the implications of the relationship between the empowerment and exploitation of women workers in flower production. The women workers incorporate their analysis of the gains

and loses of working with flowers in the analysis of how and why they came to work in the sector and in their analysis of the tasks needed to produce a cut flower. On one hand, women workers acknowledge the employment in the sector as offering better conditions than domestic work in terms of earning the minimum wage, working fixed hours and the provision of health insurance. On the other hand, they are also aware of the progressive deterioration of the working conditions, and this has several dimensions. One aspect concerns health and safety issues such as illness derived from permanent contact with pesticides, exposure to changing temperatures and sunburns. Another aspect involves deterioration of employment conditions such as the widespread use of subcontracting that result in job insecurity, with workers constantly working under short term verbal contracts where the gains mentioned before are hardly part of the job contract. Finally, the minimum wage that has been highlighted as one the advantages of working in the cut flower industry is not enough to cover living expenses of the women workers who, as we have seen before, are also in the great majority heads of family and need to resort to work overtime to complement their income.

The women workers interviewed are involved in a variety of initiatives to change conditions in the sector, and the Colombian society in general. They recognise the widespread problems of the sector but also the potential of their initiatives to change it into humane and dignify work.

¹ The pitaya (*hylocereus undatus*) is a type of warm-climate cacti fruit, also known as dragon fruit in Malaysia.

Chapter 5: THE POLITICS OF CONSUMPTION (THE GIFT)

Introduction

In this chapter I am going to explore how flowers are transformed as they move from being a commodity into the gift form. Thousands of people around the world work to make this transformation happen, not physically, because flowers do not undergo significant material transformation in the time since we left them in the *cultivo*, apart from being sprayed with pesticides and being chilled, but a transformation of their meanings. Exporter and importer companies; flower markets; flower auctions; international florist companies; small florists; mail order florists; supermarkets; greengrocer shops and garage shops all participate in different degrees in the commercialisation of flowers, as well as in the transformation of their meanings during the change from commodity to gift.

The first part of the chapter draws on the interviews with UK consumers and considers their giving and receiving of flowers and the social relations that these acts produce and reproduce. A number of binary oppositions are identified in relation to questions of taste and meaning. The second part of the chapter explores the investments of the informants in ethical consumption and their knowledge of cut flower production. They are found to be generally ill-informed, notwithstanding their general awareness of ethical issues, suggesting that the cut flower campaigns have a long way to go.

5.1 FLOWER GIVING AND RECEIVING

Flowers as gifts

According to the ILO (International Labour Office):

Gift-giving (to congratulate, apologize, commiserate, express love and affection) is the most frequently stated reason for buying flowers (over 70 per cent of all purchases in the United Kingdom and Austria; over 50 per cent on average). As such, flowers compete with wine and chocolates, which are bought for the same reason. (2000, no page)

As we have seen in the literature review, gift relations are ambiguous: they are unsolicited acts of generosity, but acts for which returns may be expected, therefore carrying obligations and making or reinforcing social ties. Flowers can be an ‘acceptable face of giving’ – the gift has no intrinsic value (although it may cost a good deal), and it does not last. Those who have a sophisticated relationship with the language of flowers and the aesthetics of flowers may not find all the flowers pleasing but mostly people do. So the gift of flowers may be intended, or may at least present itself as intending, to do no more than to give pleasure, to mark affection, duty or occasion, to mark loss and for ephemeral display. Flowers carry overwhelming connotations of ‘goodwill’, innocence and beauty. They may be considered a ‘safe’ gift. Apart from those that have strong personal meanings (such as a gift of a red rose), their meanings are not very specific. However as we shall see, the interpretations of the meanings of flowers allow the gift to express ambivalence within the relationship that they honour.

The majority of the informants have been involved in giving and receiving cut flowers and therefore, have been at both ends of the gift exchange. They are familiar with cut flowers when they are still a commodity and have been agents in their transformation into gifts.

The particular social relations that the informants mentioned as mediated by flowers were familiar or close intimate relations: partners, mothers, fathers, and sisters; their extended family e.g. aunts; their friends, close friends and acquaintances. In one less common case in my research, the relationship was with a patient.

However, not all the relations that were honoured by the gift of flowers had the same characteristics and intensity. The question that arises is how important flower giving and receiving is to them in marking and honouring significant social relations, or, on the other hand, in making more casual gestures towards others who are not particularly close. How carefully do they choose the flowers to ensure they are 'appropriate', and by what criteria? Are there differences in the types of flowers that they give to different recipients, and in the amount of care with which they are chosen? How does the classification of seasonal/non-seasonal, exotic versus simple or more 'natural', cheaper versus expensive etc. operate? Is it systematic? Can any pattern be detected across the different responses? To what extent do they associate flowers themselves with 'innocent' giving, with good will, with love of ephemeral beauty or with sharing this beauty. How 'invested' are they in the life of flowers?

Ties that bind? Family and lovers

Ash

Ash has given flowers and ‘both times were for my mother and sister’; according to him giving flowers to his mother was a completely spontaneous act. He says that:

I just came down to visit from Lancaster and just wanted to just give her some...you know it wasn't her birthday...it was completely...it was completely on the spur of the moment, I just went to get something and it was easy to get some flowers...(Ash)

Before the interview we had a conversation about consumer politics and my work in Colombia. It may be that Ash was reacting to this conversation and justifying his act of buying flowers in a particular way. He says that it was a spontaneous act, therefore, without time to think about the implications of buying flowers and it clears him from the responsibility of buying flowers as opposed to a carefully planned weekly shop where he could devote time to making ethical decisions about what to buy. He says that he wanted to give something to his mother and flowers were there on his way. Flowers seemed convenient.

He continues:

Did you have an idea what you wanted to buy?

Something not too expensive [laughs] I'm afraid to say, yeah, just a small bunch...but no, I am not into which flowers, not particularly... I'd just say something for...just say what...flowers, flowers that are ready to open... (Ash)

You remember which ones?

I maybe Green [he belongs to the Green Party] but names of flowers...

Colours then...

Yellow...

So you went to a shop and looked for something nice...

Yes, as I said flowers that aren't already open...so they are a bit... I wouldn't go for red, you know it's kind of gaudy ...so, just something that looks attractive, something that is not too gaudy, you know... (Ash)

As we have just seen, however spontaneous the act of buying flowers, it was mediated by some other decisions in terms of taste. Cut flowers seem to be a 'safe' choice for Ash. He recognises that even though he belongs to the Green Party, he does not know much about flowers, still he applies his taste judgement to the colour, size and openness of the bunch of flowers he gives to his mother. Therefore, even when flowers are a 'safe' choice in general, not all flowers would be 'safe' and appropriate; he considers that red flowers are too loud and extravagant and perhaps indicate bad taste. Even on the spur of the moment, the spontaneous act is mediated by his parameters of taste that tell him that cut flowers are an easy choice provided that they comply with certain rules. Not all flowers would have conformed to his criteria.

Virginia

Virginia's relationships are mediated by flowers in a more complex way than Ash. She receives, gives, uses, plants and buys flowers. However, and perhaps also influenced by the introductory conversation we had before the interview, she said that she did not remember clearly for whom and when the last time was that she had given flowers as presents:

I am trying to think the last time I actually gave flowers, not frequent in time actually...no, I don't tend to give flowers very much, now I suppose I would give plants to people, you know but not flow...not cut flowers very much, so probably you know months ago the last time...(Virginia)

However, as the interview progressed she pointed out that:

It was probably to my mum [laughs], actually but I can't remember, I mean, sometimes I take flowers to friends as well if I am going to eat there so that...but I haven't done it recently...yes, probably my mother because I was visiting and I know she likes flowers but I can't actually remember ...(Virginia)

Virginia points out that she gives flowers to her friends, referred to later, but it seems that one of the main cut flower recipients is her mother. It does not seem to be a one-off spontaneous impulse, rather part of a ritual of visits and flower exchanges.

Virginia says that: 'she [her mother] often brings flowers when she comes to eat, in fact nearly always she'd bring a bunch of flowers' (Virginia) and Mitch, Virginia's partner adds that: 'her mother often brings flowers when she comes for meals, so it's nothing specific, it's probably for both of us and she often buys lilies, you know, very scented, I don't know where they come from' (Mitch).

There is an exchange of floral gifts between mother and daughter (and son-in-law) and an exchange that seems to be done routinely to the extent that Virginia does not seem to be aware of it. It does not seem that Virginia's mother is marking a special occasion by bringing flowers almost every time she comes for meals at Virginia's and Mitch's house, even though the type of flower she brings, lilies, would be considered 'special', as we are going to see, by other informants. Virginia's mother seems to prefer these flowers for routine giving, as pointed out by Mitch and as

Virginia corroborates: 'she'd bring lilies; she really likes lilies so she always brings lilies' (Virginia).

The triangle of Virginia, her mother, and Mitch, her husband, is particularly interesting. While I do not have enough information to do more than speculate about the complex and ambivalent meanings that are at play in this three-way relationship, what Mitch and Virginia say about the flowers the mother regularly gives suggests very strongly that these meanings are not as 'innocent' as they appear to be or as the mother may mean them to be. So even in an apparently straightforward case of generous giving to celebrate a valued relationship, the gift and the comments made may point to the ways in which 'innocent' gifts may be fraught. When we think of the manner in which 'the mother-in-law' is figured in popular culture, it is clear that we are dealing with a relationship that is widely recognised as deeply problematic.

Virginia's mother gives Virginia flowers whenever she comes for a meal, which seems to be quite often. The flowers *may* be for Mitch as well as for Virginia, but his very raising of this suggests he is not quite sure. His words are 'it's nothing specific, it's probably for both of us'. But they may be primarily for Virginia and the gift may make Mitch feel slightly excluded. In terms of the oedipal triangle, Mitch occupies the position of the man who is excluded from the close bond that characterises the mother-baby dyad, Virginia's father. His response, that of subtly trashing the gift, suggests that he may feel something of a threat in this situation. After all, Virginia's mother is her first pre-oedipal love (if Freud and the object-relations theorists are

right), and the one to whom Virginia may confide or even return to, if things go wrong between her and Mitch.

Mitch expresses his flower preferences as follows:

I like roses, I like colourful flowers, I like the brighter colour flowers not pale ones. I don't like lilies that much I find them a bit too scented, but I like freesias, I like wild flowers a lot, the ones that you find in the country, a mixture of flowers, I almost prefer those to commercial ones...I like daffodils in spring, I like lilies, lily of the valley, I like roses, I quite like carnations but they look a bit artificial, sometimes they look good but then they don't seem that fresh, I like the smell really rather than...sometimes you buy roses and they don't smell at all, you know they are completely about colour but they don't have any smell...I like them to be scented, aromatic. I mean that's the best, you know flowers that are beautiful but they also smell nice... (Mitch)

Mitch sets up a number of oppositions, based on his professed knowledge of the meanings of flowers, and his own pronounced taste. These are:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| small (unpretentious) | - | large, showy |
| colourful | - | (too) pale |
| aromatic/scented | - | too powerfully scented/unscented |
| natural/wild | - | artificial |

Virginia's mother's gift is found wanting in all respects: they are in every way excessive – too large, too pale, too heavily scented, too artificial. She is further damned by the observation that she 'probably always brings lilies because *she* (*emphasis added*) really likes them' not because Virginia does.

It is interesting that Mitch actually contradicts himself in his statement of his taste. He prefers ‘colourful’ flowers to the too pale lilies. He mentions liking freesias, which are both strongly coloured, multicoloured, and delicate as well as scented. Freesias are as strongly scented as lilies, but it is true that they have a scent that might be described as fresher, less cloying. However Mitch goes on to fault the lilies on a second count – they are too showy and artificial. He prefers wild, more ‘natural’ flowers – he mentions lily-of-the-valley and daffodils. But the former is just as pale as Virginia’s mother’s lilies. And freesias are perhaps just as ‘artificial’. Daffodils are monochrome, like the lilies, and pastel-shaded, not ‘colourful’ in the way in which the freesias are.

When I asked Virginia *and you like lilies?* her response was very enthusiastic: ‘I do, yes! I don’t know if I’d always buy them for myself but I do like them when I am given them, yeah’ (Virginia). However, when I asked her what flowers she would buy for her mother in return she answered that ‘I wouldn’t buy lilies for her [Virginia’s mother], no, not necessarily, I actually prefer not such big flowers’ (Virginia). Virginia is placed in a bit of a dilemma, and her own comments are revealing. She responds enthusiastically and positively to the question about whether she likes the lilies, but immediately qualifies this by adding that she ‘would not buy them for herself’. She prefers smaller, less showy flowers. In other words, she aligns herself with Mitch’s judgement, yet the very positive enthusiasm suggests that she is actually more ambivalent. She does not want to have to choose between the ‘rivals’ for her affection – her mother and Mitch. So she equivocates.

Virginia and Mitch give flowers to each other. Not as frequently as Virginia's mother's gifts but they mentioned occasions where they have exchanged flowers, although he says that: 'sometimes I buy them for Virginia, just because it is nice to have something like flowers in the house, something nice and cheers the house up a bit...' (Mitch).

Mitch says that he buys flowers for Virginia, although it seems that he might be buying them for himself; to decorate their house, to cheer up the house and he might be using Virginia as an excuse to display flowers he likes. Perhaps buying the flowers he likes and giving them to Virginia legitimises the act of buying flowers. He might need to have Virginia as a repository of the gift because he might not consider it socially acceptable to give flowers to himself. Mitch is giving Virginia but also 'us' - Virginia and Mitch – the gift, and it is affirming his taste.

On the other hand, Mitch's flowers might be directed to Virginia but he may want to hide the 'romantic' side of the exchange of flowers and try and construct a more utilitarian side of his giving of flowers to Virginia. The purpose of the exchange, then, might not be the romantic giving and receiving of the flowers but the aim might be that they have to perform a task and decorate and cheer up the house. In so doing, he expresses his taste ambivalence.

Mitch initially does not seem to remember or give too much importance to the kind of flowers he chose for Virginia, he says that 'Yeah, usually...I can't remember what

they were actually...I can't remember what they were...they might have been daffodils...It might have been, I haven't bought flowers for a while' (Mitch). When asked whether he knew which flowers Virginia liked, he expands a bit more on his answer indicating that he has a deep knowledge of Virginia's preferences in flowers. He says that 'she likes freesias, likes colourful flowers, likes roses but I bet she buys roses because we don't have them at this time of the year and that's it, I think' (Mitch). Mitch also implies that he knows better than Virginia's mother what Virginia's taste really is like.

So it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Mitch is using this series of oppositions to fault the gift of the lilies in a manner that is rather loaded. It makes us wonder whether he is not also suggesting a certain level of hostility towards the giver – a hostility that he may not even be fully conscious of, and would probably disavow as strongly as Virginia avows her enthusiastic liking for the lilies her mother gives, whilst simultaneously disavowing this. Would it be pushing the interpretation too far to suggest that there is the hint that the relationship that is clearly valued is one that may also be experienced as a little *too* close at times? The flowers are a little overwhelming in their heavy scent and showiness. Is the tie that is celebrated in the gift also one that may at times be felt to threaten to overwhelm? The mother's visits are frequent – too frequent? It is difficult to know. Flowers, as they circulate as gifts, open up the possibility that they do not only mark important relationships but may also convey the ambivalences of these very close ties. There is much room for negotiation over the meaning of the flowers and the gifts. Virginia's mother's gifts

are good for display, but they do not show much appreciation of Virginia's personal taste. They are interpreted in terms of the character of the mother and her tastes, instead of the terms in which she presumably intended them. They are not received as 'innocent'.

Heather

The interview with Heather revealed a second triangle: her father, Heather and one member of which is dead, her stepmother. Heather explains that when her father's second wife died:

To get over her he went around the world visiting his grandchildren, and when he came back, he came back to a new flat. He had sold the other one and everything, and I made sure there were some flowers of the type that his former wife always had in the house. So I bought some of those flowers for his flat. (Heather)

Heather got some flowers for her father to be waiting for him at his return to his new flat. She made sure they were the same types of flowers that his former wife always had in the house and chose the flowers based on the knowledge she had about her stepmother's taste in flowers:

They were geraniums, nothing special but...like in France, Austria, the geranium is a very central plant, the houses on the outside have geraniums, you know the Swiss chalet? Have you seen pictures of it? With the huge balconies, geraniums, geraniums, geraniums, it's a flower with a national identity. She was a Viennese, so the geranium has more than just the significance of colour. She had them in her flat, in the flat, quite often and I always thought of them as rather boring everyday flowers, a geranium. You know. And given that she had a lot of style and flowers were open to her I think I had to work out, you know, why this woman goes and buys geraniums? You know, when she could buy orchids! And I think I came to understand the meaning of the geranium to that Central European culture, it's far more than just the flower. Yeah? Just over time trying to work out that I realised. (Heather)

Again the stepmother is a figure loaded with opprobrium in popular mythology and culture – think of Cinderella and Snow White. The father, in this particular post-oedipal triangle, is usually a weak and ineffectual figure, who fails to look after his daughter's interests. Perhaps, because the stepmother is dead, Heather is able to make the loving gesture (as she reads it) of honouring her father's loss by filling the flat with her stepmother's favourite flowers – geraniums. Geraniums can illustrate Heather's relationship with her stepmother. Heather points out how her stepmother's relationship with flowers was rooted in her origins and how particular and legitimate were therefore the meanings that she gave to the geraniums. The other factor that she points out in admiration of her stepmother is the fact that she knew about geraniums and flowers in general:

...my husband is a garden flower fanatic, he loves it, it is central to his life so he was always exchanging things with her about flowers, cuttings, and so on. So if we went to a park and he saw an unusual geranium he would take a sample, you know they would talk about. She didn't want fancy ones, that's not the point, that's to be the standard range of geranium. Next time you see a Swiss chalet, you will know... (Heather)

In contrast, when she is confronted by a gift of flowers given to her by her father, she expresses discomfort:

Well, my dad gave me a bunch of chrysanthemums as 'thanks you' for setting up his flat, yeah? It was just a stock of them...very awkward, he doesn't usually give me flowers, I am his daughter! One gives each other hugs not thank words, so it was quite strange to receive flowers from him but he wanted to mark that he'd definitely recognised what I have done, you know? Maybe also somebody had said to him: 'oh, you must give your daughter some flowers because she's been here all the time looking after your flat'. I think that's more true, that somebody else gave him the idea that he needed to do that, to give flowers, it's English! (Heather)

After closely associating her stepmother with flowers, she is taken by surprise when her father first responds too soon to the gift of flowers left in his house and second, responds using flowers. Heather considers that flowers are not part of her relationship with her father, in fact for her they should not be part of any relationship between fathers and daughters. For her, flowers coming from her father are meaningless things. Contrary to the flowers coming from her to her father in remembrance of his lost wife, they do not have the history, the geography and the social meanings that the geraniums have and therefore they are not legitimate.

She acknowledges that he wants to recognise the work she has done to organise his flat, but she is upset about him following the 'trend', the 'fashion' of giving flowers to her just because he might have been told to do so and because he did not stop to think what object or expression of affection would be meaningful to express his thanks in a way that they both would understand.

Another factor in her negative response towards the flowers given by her father is that Heather knew about her stepmother's tastes and history. Heather had invested time and energy getting to know her past and the meanings she had given to the geraniums and also she has invested time and emotion in preparing her father's flat and in looking for what she considered the appropriate touch waiting for him: the geraniums that would remind him of his wife in a caring way. On the other hand, for Heather, her father did not even seem to have understood the meaning of the geraniums in his flat and responded with 'other' flowers, as if all the flowers were

the same, he did not even seem to have been curious to find out which was her favourite flower:

And you like chrysanthemums?

Not to fall over but they are nice!

But is [it] not your favourite flower?

It's not a significant flower, no.

Would he have known that it wasn't your...?

No, he wouldn't have known. (Heather)

The father is the focus of her dissatisfaction, because he does not seem to have recognised the significance of her gesture, nor to have been able to respond appropriately. Heather is able to present herself in a very favourable light: the sensitive daughter, whose own feelings towards her stepmother, had they been resentful, treating her as her mother's replacement, would have been socially sanctioned ones. In effect she is saying 'I have been generous and kind in acknowledging the importance to you of a relationship that (everyone knows) is always difficult for a girl/woman, but you, as is typical of fathers in such situations, have failed to appreciate your daughter'.

Less binding ties

Michael

Outside the circle of close family relations, Michael has sent flowers to a relative: his aunt, and he explains why:

My mother died in February, she was the twin of this aunt and I have never sent her a birthday present as a rule, I don't have much to do with her unless we exchange Christmas cards, birthday cards, seeing her at weddings and funerals. But she was so sad about her twin's death and I was so sad for my mother's death. So I thought what kind of birthday is that? If someone possibly knew this, some one who understands and made sure she had a birthday and I know she loves golden flowers, gold carnations...I think it was my mother who knew, she was crazy about flowers, crazy, they were identical twins, you see? And they had very similar tastes... (Michael)

These flowers mark a common tie and a common loss: Michael's loss of his mother and her sister's loss of a twin. But because the tie between Michael and his aunt was not a close one his was a gift that was likely to be appreciated rather than subjected to the critical appraisal that we saw in relation to Virginia's mother's choice and Heather's father. There was less at stake here and less possibility of misreading.

He sent the flowers 'by post, from Jersey. I rang this company in Jersey called Flying Flowers; they grow their own flowers in Jersey and fly them in polystyrene boxes, first class' (Michael). Apart from the fact that the flowers are delivered by a mail order company rather than bought in the supermarket, which makes them even more special for Michael, he notes that the company is also special because it is a domestic company that grow their own flowers, which is becoming rare in the UK.

However, some other practical considerations played a role, when I asked him again what kind of flowers he sent to his aunt; he said that 'these were mainly carnations. Why carnations? That was the offer of the time and also the favourite flower of my aunt' (Michael).

It seems that exchanging flowers on a regular basis within the family is synonymous with intimacy, shared and motivated by different relations. But, as we have seen, for those who are skilled in the 'language of flowers', the gift may be used simultaneously to confirm the relationship yet to express its tensions or ambiguity. For example, between Virginia and her mother, and between Virginia and Mitch, there are exchanges of flowers that accompany visits and meals on a quite regular basis; between Heather, her husband and her stepmother, giving flowers was motivated by their common interest in geraniums and gardening, an interest that they do not seem to share with her father and therefore, he is not a legitimate 'giver' of flowers, he is not entitled to 'use' flowers because he does not know about them.

On the other hand, one of the 'spontaneous' flower givers (to their relatives) seems to be less concerned about his knowledge of the flower and prefers to rely on the fact that once complying to certain general aspects he sees flowers as a 'safe' gift, easy to get without having to think too much and which will be welcomed.

The other flower giver, who seemed to be a 'spontaneous' giver, in reality seemed to have carefully thought about how to make the gift very special. Not only about when it was the right occasion to send flowers (that would be recognising their shared grief at the same time): a birthday, but also the right flowers, the ones that he understood were his aunt's favourites (that she might also share with her sister, therefore would be a reminder of her). They are special flowers because they are grown locally in the

UK (as opposed to globalised flowers with all the implications of being ‘artificial’) and are sent in a special way, by post, first class in polystyrene boxes.

The giving and receiving of flowers seems to be less risky when the relationships marked are less close. This is the case with the gift of flowers to the dead mother’s twin. The gift is likely to be appreciated as a mark of sensitivity to a common loss, but as Michael is not close to his mother’s sister, it is less likely to be misinterpreted.

Valentine’s gift

Valentine’s Day is the time of the year when gifts of red roses might be invested with romantic meanings or might just be playful advances that may or may not be taken seriously. The game of the red rose on Valentine’s Day is played by the donor but the recipient ultimately decides about the meaning of the red rose. Therefore, the red rose is an ambivalent gift on Valentine’s Day; gifts that at other times of the year could be compromising, on Valentine’s Day might just be a light-hearted way of making advances. They could be interpreted as an ironic or at least only a tentative gesture of attraction, which it is possible for both parties to laugh off or to take up.

Ash smiles when he remembers that he did once receive a red rose for Valentine’s Day and how he got engaged in the game of finding out who the ‘secret admirer’ was; he says that ‘at the time I didn’t know really who it was, it could have been anybody really, to be honest’. He finally found out who the donor was:

It took me a while to do it but I figured it out...she said: yes I did it and I said: thank you very much but I think at this stage, we knew, she knew I was...married...On the card it said... there was no name but there was kind of a very stylised letter, like a J, it took me a while to work out the letter then I thought 'ah, ok, I know who's the J' and I knew...(Ash)

I asked Ash how he knew that the person was romantically interested in him just by looking at the flower and his answer was 'ah...well, red rose! Single red rose, symbol of love or at least treasure!, you know...'(Ash).

However, the red rose by itself might not have signified the romantic and sexual interest that Ash now invests it with. He could have ignored it or he could just have taken it as an ironic gesture or as a Valentine's joke. Instead, he tries to find out who the donor is and only when he has, does he invest the flower with romantic and sexual meanings, and for him the game dictates that he has to take it up or decline the advance. In his view, he is then the one who has to make a decision, he is in control, and in spite of the fact that he is flattered, 'thank you very much', he declines the advance, his explanation being that he is married.

But as a Valentine's Day gift that may (or may not) be the first move in the expression of romantic/erotic interest, the very fact that it is an occasion when 'the tables may be turned', when women may propose to men, and jokes abound, means that it is a move that is not too risky. It can have a range of interpretations, be interpreted as ironic if it is not taken seriously, or as serious if it is.

On the other hand, in an established relationship such as Mitch and Virginia's, the gift of the red rose on Valentine's Day may cease to signify the 'romance' of the first stages of the relationship and the personal meaning might be overtaken by the tradition:

I bought Virginia a rose, a red rose on Valentine's Day, this year...I guess it was spontaneous but it's kind of a traditional thing, you know it is Valentine's Day you buy flowers, you know, but actually I haven't bought many flowers recently, shame really, it would be nice to buy more... (Mitch)

Early on in the relationship it may have had a deeper significance, but now Mitch disinvests it from romantic meanings and he does so with a sense of irony: it is Valentine's Day therefore this is what you have to do, you give flowers. Virginia, meanwhile, doesn't remember the Valentine's flower given by Mitch as a significant flower gift that she has received; when asked about receiving flowers she says that '[last time] I was given flowers by my mum' (Virginia).

Marking the different stages of a 'romance' that may (or may not) blossom into a relationship is one of the range of meanings attached to the very stereotypical traditional meaning of the red rose.

Gift hierarchies

As we have established in the last section, flowers are used as markers of relationships but also as markers of taste. In this section I am going to analyse the circulation of flowers as gifts among friends. As we are going to see, Holly, Virginia and Hazel have established some hierarchies in their giving and receiving of flowers

between friends, where flowers not only mark the special character of the occasion but also their judgement of taste. Not all the occasions are marked in the same way with the same flowers.

‘Ordinary’ flowers

Holly has established her own flower gift hierarchy. She mentioned two categories of occasions and different flowers to suit these categories. One of these occasions is dinner and visits, where she says that ‘if I’d go, say for a meal, if they invite me for a meal then I go and pick some flowers from the garden or go to the shop and buy a bunch of daffodils or whatever... I buy flowers from Sainsbury’s, I buy flowers from Tesco’s.’ (Holly). For this less special occasion she chooses to give ‘ordinary flowers’, apparently an easy choice but one that still needs to comply with certain characteristics: ‘chrysanthemums or carnations. I’d choose flowers that last the longer; I don’t remember the name alstroemerias? Yes. Little lilies...I’d buy those, irises, daffodils, tulips also carnations...I don’t buy very ostentatious ones, only if there is a special occasion’ (Holly).

Her criteria for dinner flowers are therefore that they should be accessible flowers with a long vase life that may also indicate values in agreement with ‘lack of ostentation’. She suggests a familiarity with the use of flowers in an everyday routine. Going for dinner with friends should be marked but not too much. It should not be marked as a special matter, as a rare occasion, but more part of a ‘normal’ exchange of compliments among friends. As indicated by Davies (2000), the gift

among Holly's friends moves horizontally, and more symmetrically, compared to the triangle between Virginia, her mother and her partner. However, the 'ordinary exchange' does not imply that the gift does not create some sort of expectation of being returned.

Virginia also mentions that she takes flowers to friends when she goes to eat at their houses. Mitch, her partner also says that : 'sometimes if we go out for a meal to a friend I may buy some flowers...I'd like to buy more, I tend not to, I mean the flowers are nice and that...I certainly, occasionally buy for dinner parties' (Mitch).

'Special' flowers

The other occasion categorised by Holly is a 'special occasion' that gives her license to use flowers that are in opposition to her mentioned values: 'last Saturday, a friend was celebrating his fiftieth birthday so I bought a big lily. They are very expensive, they cost three pounds fifty just for one, and they are called Casablanca lilies. I was looking for something special' (Holly).

The special occasion may suggest that it is a one off occasion where breaking the conventional expectation is allowed and the criteria favoured are in opposition to her regular choice of flowers:

I went to the Garden Centre first, just outside Leamington to see if they have it, then I went to another flower shop near Gaia. They had another lily, a different type and it didn't smell, it was a smaller one and it didn't look as grand as the Casablanca so then I went to another shop and by then it was quarter past five on a Saturday and thank goodness they had this big Casablanca lily. (Holly)

Apart from breaking her own rules regarding value and appearance, Holly is also breaking another convention with the Casablanca lily. White lilies have been 'traditionally' associated with death. However, recently flower stylists such as Jane Packer have been reclaiming lilies to be used on special occasions such as weddings and parties (flower arranging television programme on cable).

Flower gifting is widely used by Holly and seems to be central in reinforcing social ties with her friends both on every day and special occasions. The time and investment devoted to choosing or getting flowers for these occasions varies, still she has some set of minimum standards that apply to the apparently more everyday or spontaneous gift of flowers: the dinner flowers.

As the conversation progresses, Virginia remembers that she has also given flowers to her friends on special occasions, not just for dinner parties: 'I know the last time I brought flowers! It was to somebody's birthday. Yeah, a friend's birthday...so I gave him that because I thought it was a good present and that was in February...' (Virginia).

Virginia, as well as Holly, also wanted to give a special gift to her friend: 'I brought him, a man, those amaryllis, you know them? And they had this...just one amaryllis with a huge flower! And you know it was a kind of unusual kind of bunch of flowers with some grass and...I bought it in a flower shop in Regency' (Virginia). Even

though Virginia makes it clear that her preference is for small, unpretentious and ‘natural’ fragrant and colourful flowers for herself, she is well on the way towards reproducing her mother’s practice of giving extravagant and ostentatious flowers – the amaryllis in February. The amaryllis is a form of lily and although she agrees with Mitch’s judgement of her mother’s gift, she clearly thinks a showy lily ‘appropriate’ to the particular occasion – her gift to a male colleague. Looked at in terms of the display of ‘taste’ this is related to both the binaries by which the flowers are judged (colour, size, scent, naturalness) and sensitivity to the ‘appropriateness’ in relation to gift hierarchies. She displays her taste not only through personal likes and dislikes – her appreciation of the aesthetic, sensual beauties of flowers and the way they harmonise with house décor etc - but also in terms of their ability to ‘get it right’ in terms of the occasion. This might mean, as in the case of Heather and the geraniums, giving flowers that she does not particularly like, but that are ‘suitable’ for the occasion and the recipient.

The differences between ‘special’ and ‘ordinary’ flowers

The criteria for distinguishing between ‘ordinary’ and ‘special’ might not so much be based on where the cut flowers actually originated, as on whether they are flowers of the type that may be grown in English gardens. Holly, for example, points out:

I like to buy flowers that are in season, I don’t like buying tulips in the middle of summer it’s so silly or daffodils at Christmas, I can’t do that. Daffodils don’t grow until January, February. But there are some flowers that are exotic and I don’t know when they...or whatever they come from greenhouses like lilies, this big, big lilies or roses. (Holly)

This distinction cuts across the seasonal/non-seasonal one. Flowers that are 'ordinary' in the common or garden sense, are un-seasonal when they are sold at a time when they are not in English gardens. It is only non-native flowers ('exotic', rare) that are exempt from the seasonal/non-seasonal opposition. They are never 'in season' because they are not 'garden flowers'. Flowers that are, on the face of it, 'unpretentious' because they are 'common or garden' may be judged pretentious ('silly' in Holly's term) when they are bought out of season – hence her rejection of daffodils and tulips at Christmas.

But many flowers that are 'common or garden' are also those that are commercially grown across the globe – carnations, chrysanthemums, spray roses, etc. – the staples of cut flower production. These are sometimes judged and found wanting on such grounds as their lack of scent and perhaps the very fact that they are so uniform and mass produced. On the other hand they are relatively cheap and practical because they are long lasting. Therefore, complex judgements and criteria are in play in choosing flowers. What is clear is that the meanings of cut flowers are produced in terms of the social relationships among consumers. The criteria very much refer to the constructed particularities of the product as gift and whether it fits certain patterns of taste, rather than relating to the commodity.

Special occasions, however, do not necessarily mean that a gift is given to somebody else. Both Virginia and Holly are used to giving flowers to themselves as a treat:

I suppose this is my kind of treat thing or a nice fruit! A fruit which is not in season like strawberries in November or something that'd be a real treat but I tend not to do that, I tend more to buy clothes or flowers or music. Maybe if I was passing the shop you know I might see something and oh yes! But it's not something that I'd do very often, it's more a special occasion or if it's Christmas or something, I suppose...on the whole I'd prefer, for myself, smaller flowers like anemones ...I don't know. I have two feelings about flowers, one is that in a way I prefer smaller ones but then I can get into a flower shop and get very excited seeing all the flowers. (Virginia)

Virginia seems to have different ways of treating herself to something nice. There are small treats such as a fruit which is not in season and big, special occasion treats such as at Christmas time when she prefers flowers, clothes and music. However, regarding flowers, her choices can be unstable and sometimes small treats can be converted into big treats as she says sometimes happens when she walks into a flower shop. She talks about her two feelings about flowers: that usually she prefers small flowers but this preference may change if she gets into the shop and gets very excited about all the flowers; she might not be able to restrain herself to the usual small ones. Virginia has a very sophisticated knowledge of flowers and she uses flowers to give to her family and friends. She knows what she wants to buy, give and receive. Although she is open to impulse buying, it is impulse buying constrained by some parameters, as she points out:

But if I was going to buy flowers for myself I don't know, I'd look for colour perhaps what colour I wanted maybe...I'd think about the colour of the rooms in this house so I'd think I suppose my favourite colours are orange and pink and red those kind of warm colours, yellow... I think if I'd go to a flower shop by myself to buy flowers I'd be prepared to spend money and get something that is not particularly seasonal maybe so it would be like a treat, I would be really treating myself to something nice so it wouldn't necessarily be seasonal...(Virginia)

What looks like a personal, individual choice that would only need to fulfil the expectations of the person who is making it, such as indulging herself buying some flowers, turns out to be a more complicated exercise whereby she needs to think about the ‘outside’, her social environment, in this case the colours of the rooms in the house she shares with Mitch. She does not seem to be ‘free’ to choose whatever she wants from the flower shop, but needs to choose within some range of flowers and in this case they are the ones with warm colours.

Similarly to the example when Mitch needs to justify his buying flowers for Virginia, she also needs to bring in the decoration of the house to justify her spending money on herself and when she does it she is prepared to spend money on flowers that are ‘special’, meaning flowers that are not particularly seasonal.

Holly also refers to the act of giving flowers to oneself:

Do you think flowers like buying flowers for myself are also giving flowers as presents? Then I often do, it’s also something very traditional coming from Holland. People give flowers to each other all the time; you must have noticed it when you were in The Hague perhaps... (Holly)

Holly seems to be a bit surprised to include gifts to oneself in the general idea of a gift. She says that she gives flowers to herself very often and that this is a very traditional practice in Holland. For her, people give flowers to each other all the time and she is just a ‘normal’ Dutch person who gives flowers to people and to herself.

The taste for flowers

The informants build their taste judgement based on several sets of oppositions such as small vs. large flowers, aromatic/scented vs. too powerfully scented, natural/wild vs. artificial, etc. These oppositions are used widely by the informants which shows that there is at least a rudimentary 'language of flowers' in play here – a grammar and syntax of flowers and their relationship to gift hierarchies and relations. Like all languages, this one is flexible in use. Each act of giving flowers is similar to a speech act, and it may vary from the conventional to the imaginative and particular. The way the language is used, the extent of the vocabulary, may better indicate the variability of flower culture rather than in terms of the dominance of one particular flower culture over another.

This individual and particular 'language of flowers' might be in turn shaped and influenced by fashion and commerce, or sustained in opposition to their values. In an article in the *Independent on Sunday* in March 2000 entitled 'The Flowers and the Glory' the author, Malcolm Macalister Hall, celebrates the success of British florists around the world: 'from Oscar night parties to political rallies, all the most prestigious contracts are going to a small bunch of Londoners' (2000:19). He quotes an informant from the women's magazine world saying that:

There is a huge snobbery about flowers, and which florists they come from, and also what sort of flowers you send somebody...there are fashionable flowers that are in, and some that are out at the moment – chrysanthemums are out, of course - and you just don't send those sort of flowers. (2000:19 - 21)

Macalister Hall refers to the ways that taste is policed through the definition of 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' flowers. His informant continues:

I've often seen flowers that are 'unacceptable' – flowers that you wouldn't want to be seen walking home if you were a *Tatler/Vogue/Harpers* girl. They're left in the ladies' at the office, and you go in the next day and they're still there, dumped in the sink. They're given some water – because nobody likes to be unkind - but they're there for days and days until the cleaning lady gets rid of them (2000:21).

The 'language of flowers' is also mentioned as rigid:

She [his informant] also says that the inscrutable 'language of flowers' can be a minefield for the unwary. 'I know that somebody was *extremely* thrilled when a top designer sent them a beautiful bouquet, and they said 'Ooh, isn't that lovely – he's sent me this wonderful bunch of lilies'. And someone snapped: 'Don't you realise that they are for *funerals*...' If you want to say to someone: 'you are history', you send them a bunch of those'. (2000:21)

However, in 2003 *The Information* magazine, from *The Independent* listed the 50 best florists in the UK. Along with the celebrity florists such as Jane Packer, Paula Pryke, Ercole Morani (Mc Queens) and Stephen Collier, they also included Marks and Spencer, Waitrose, Habitat, Laura Ashley and Tesco and the parameters to follow now seem to be more flexible:

As Morani's starting point is the personality of the recipient, it's probably best to discuss your order with him. 'In his eyes, the perfect floral gift creates both emotion and passion; his philosophy is that the real essence of giving flowers is to make the other person special'. (*The Information*, 2003: 6)

In the *Habitat* magazine of May 2003, Christian Tortu, a flower stylist referring to the secret for the perfect bouquet of flowers, also points out that:

There is nothing to bear in mind – there are no longer any taboos. Nowadays, we can just decorate our dining table with an orchid as with a lettuce. There's

both the surprise factor and the beauty of the result. It's not a question of going over the top, more a question of being brave. (2003:13)

It is difficult to point to any single body as the motor of the changes in attitude towards flower 'taste', but the increasing involvement of the supermarkets in the trade has certainly contributed to the availability of cut flowers and made less threatening the selection of the 'appropriate' flowers. Supermarkets such as Marks and Spencer invite the consumer to choose from a finite choice of ready-made bouquets. In one of their leaflets they write that 'all our bouquets are developed by experts, and individually arranged and hand-tied with co-ordinating tissue paper' and, notwithstanding that they are mail order flowers, they add that 'each gift is delivered to the door; complete with your personal message handwritten inside an attractive gift card' (M&S flowers & wine gifts direct to you, no date - see appendix 5). M&S is telling their customers that in using their mail order services they cannot get it wrong because they simply need to choose from the bouquets already approved by 'taste' experts and add a note of authenticity by dictating their message to be written by hand.

In one way or another flower-giving acts may be judged in terms of their grammar and syntax, and their 'appropriateness' to the occasion. This means, as we have seen, that gifts of flowers may not only affirm and strengthen relationships in their circulation, but may be judged and found wanting and have the effect of expressing and reproducing tensions and ambivalences within the relationships. As Davies

(2000) notes, gifts can go wrong. Perhaps with flowers, not so badly wrong as some other type of gift, therefore in this sense, flowers are still a relatively 'safe' gift.

The analysis of this small group of flower-givers/receivers shows that they are fairly heavily invested in flowers in relation to their self-perception about who they are and what their 'tastes' are, and how their taste 'distinguishes' them (Bourdieu, 1986). The Gaia group was chosen not only in relation to the expectation that they would be relatively skilled in making such judgements in relation to flowers, but for their concern as ethical consumers. The next section of the chapter will address the question of how far the 'use-value/aesthetics' frame impedes the political/ethical consumption frame. Do the informants buy as carefully, as knowledgeably and as ethically when buying flowers as gifts as they do when, for example, buying children's toys or leisure goods or even food?

5.2 CUT FLOWER CAMPAIGNS: THE COMMODITY AND THE ETHICAL CONSUMER

Cut flower campaigns are now entering their second decade, and we need to ask questions about to how far these campaigns have impacted upon the practices of producers and consumers. It is important to analyse which dimensions of cut flowers, i.e. as commodities and/or as gifts, are taken into account in the campaigns. Knowledge and information are key players in organising forms of struggle and resistance as orchestrated by unions and grass-roots organisations.

Ethical trade as a movement is relatively new, but taking into account that one of its main objectives is to bring consumers and producers closer, one might imagine that at least its users have some kind of awareness or knowledge about the movement. Therefore, we need to question how much knowledge people with general ethical consumption awareness, such as the ethical consumer informants, have about this particular commodity that has taken the form of a gift.

The ethical consumer

Some of the informants have had a long history supporting and acting within the fair and ethical trade movements. However, it is very difficult to separate the group between supporters and actors because the whole idea of the ethical consumerism movement is that consumers, who otherwise are considered to be 'passive' recipients of advertisement, can play an active role through consumption. The role expected from the consumer is not something that can be improvised at the check-out desk. Ethical consumerism, as we are going to see in this chapter, is linked to vegetarianism and animal welfare, organic products, anti-genetically modified food, environmentally friendly products and social justice. The informants have been through different degrees of involvement within the ethical consumerism movement during their lives. Michael buys fair trade because:

I suppose it is connected with my Christianity, my Christianity is fundamentally about justice in all respects, women, men, adults and children. Rich, poor or whatever, it is not worth anything, it is rubbish, if it is not fundamentally about that. The few things that makes me, that makes my blood boil is where there is injustice. (Michael)

Connected to his commitment to Christian ideals, however, might be a more practical approach that shows that he has reacted to media scares and campaigns directed to raise awareness about food consumption. Michael tells us that:

I don't say it in a pejorative way, it's become fashionable to think about your eating and to mind about it and once you start doing it you start asking all sort of questions, you are likely to change your behaviour without you knowing any conversion experience, you just change your behaviour, you just shop more carefully, you talk to other people about it. But I think it's through all the food scares that we have had recently and that's also affected quite a lot of my friends, particularly about shopping, what do I put in my trolley, these apples, these apples are sprayed with whatever and I can't give them to my kids.
(Michael)

Michael touches on a point that is vital for campaigners and academics when analysing different campaigns, and it is related to the various degrees of concern that consumers show when confronted with food and non-food products. Michael states that these concerns have helped him in becoming more inquisitive about the origin of food products. Campaigners have always argued that to raise awareness about food products is easier than non-food products for the simple reason, as Michael explains, that the consumer and her/his family are going to eat the product and so want to know whether it is safe enough to eat. What could be seen as selfish reasons, to take care of his own health through minding his food consumption, led Michael to think about the ways the product he and his family are consuming is produced. He feels compelled to do research and to discuss the issue in the shops where he and his family buy, and with friends. And through the research he has also become aware of other issues that go beyond the product itself and extend to the processes of production, such as labour issues.

Virginia's concerns also began with food:

I suppose it must have a link [interest in fair trade and interest in organic food]. I suppose hearing things on the news on T.V. oh! I don't know, things I remember from the past about you know treating citrus fruits with radiation to make them keep fresh longer, spraying fruit, and the effects of the spraying on people and wildlife, and you know...these two things I remember feeling that I didn't want to buy things that might have been sprayed. I don't know what else, probably those concerns...just the awful state, you know, of rivers, rivers near fields that have been treated with chemicals and how that runs off into the streams and rivers...you know the way that wildlife is just killed, I hate that, I hate it, it's just not right. (Virginia)

As with Michael, her reactions to media reports on damage to health and environment practices such as spraying fruit played a part in her interests in ethical issues.

Ash touches directly on labour issues when talking about why he buys fair traded products:

Because its been produced under conditions that I hope are good, I don't feel like...they add something to the gift, you know, with something that I buy that I don't know where it's produced and under which conditions, it's always a battle of mind, you know then it is just easy to walk to the shop and hand out some money for a pair of trousers but I don't know anything about people that have to sweat many days...you know, I don't know whether the conditions are all right, I've got no idea and I don't like not knowing, I don't like thinking that I might be supporting something...bad, so with fair trade I just, kind of know I am not supporting the pretty bad, at least not that bad...(Ash)

He needs to know where and how the gift is produced and knowing the how and where adds more meaning to the gift. Buying fair traded products gives him the assurance that he is not supporting bad practices and he also has information, that tends not to be clearly available for non fair traded products, to trace the life of the

product back to its early stages of production and commercialisation. He can know about the product. Ash also states that his aim is not only about knowing, but also doing something with this knowledge, even though doing sometimes involves very complex decision making:

...I don't really like to buy things from countries that I know have oppressive regimes, I don't know whether I am justified in doing it, I mean countries like China. If I was a bit brave I would challenge them [Gaia] about this, they have pumpkin seeds from China, from Turkey they have figs...also I mean things like sesame seeds...the other issue that I haven't mentioned is the distances that food travels, I don't particularly want to buy apples from New Zealand. It's very damaging to the environment in terms of the emission of greenhouse gases, if I am going to buy an orange I'd try to buy from Spain, or Italy. I wouldn't buy from South Africa but near Britain if possible...of course some of these aspects could be complex, for example if I got a choice between buying just an ordinary orange from Spain or a fair traded orange from South Africa or Israel, which do I choose? Do I choose the one that has travelled less distance or do I choose the one that is fairly traded, I think that at the moment I would choose the fairly traded. (Ash)

As Ash has pointed out above, there are different complex social, development and environmental ideas and discourses that might appear to compete for the attention and prioritisation of the consumers. With Michael it is organic food, anti-GM and fair trade and he does not find them opposed or competing. Ash has made a choice in favour of fair traded products that might pose a problem to the environment in terms of the emission of gases from aeroplane fuel when the products are transported to the North rather than buying products sourced in Britain or close to Britain that are not fair traded. Another interesting issue that shows how priorities might change and adapt is his example of Israel. At the beginning of the quotation he gives a strong speech against buying from countries with oppressive regimes and he lists China and Turkey as examples. Later on he mentions the possibility of buying fair

traded oranges from Israel. It would be interesting to see if three years later in 2003 he would still give Israel as an example of a 'safe' country to get fair traded products from.

Virginia's decisions are also complex:

We do eat vegan food sometimes but it would be very difficult to do that all the time... I have been vegetarian for seven years, not completely because I eat fish but I don't eat meat... We go to Gaia but I suppose we go there once a week, but when we go we get all sorts of things: fresh vegetables, fruits and... tins and coffee but I suppose for more organic [variety we go to]the supermarkets. I prefer in principle to go to a small shop. In terms of quality supermarkets are more even whereas Gaia is more up and down. It's very fresh and good and sometimes it looks very tired... (Virginia)

Mitch, on the other hand engages with the fair trade movement from a different angle, he says that:

I have joined organisations such as Amnesty, I get the *Ethical Consumer* magazine, Friends of the Earth, CND...I get the magazine regularly but I don't always read it...and I suppose the more...even things like when I spend money on insurance, I paid money on insurance with a...what was it called now?...I don't remember the name of the company but anyway and they discovered that they were owned by a tobacco company, so I have been trying to change my insurance payments to different companies...(Mitch)

Mitch introduces us to another concern within the ethical consumerism movement, that is with services, in this case financial services such as insurance. Well known cases such as Barclay's and Shell have been wake-up calls for the ethical consumer. The problem is that only the major human rights scandals tend to appear in the news and thousands and thousands of other cases do not pass onto the mainstream media and to the public. Mitch is concerned to know who owns the insurance company he

uses and what sort of investments they make. The problem is that the world of finance and investment in this country and internationally seems to be very closed and secretive. The consumer has to resort to intermediaries to get information about companies and their relationship with human rights violations around the world. Mitch points out that he subscribes to the *Ethical Consumer* magazine and with his membership of Amnesty, Friends of the Earth and CND he might also get news and information from these sources. I will come back to the intermediary issue later in the chapter.

Mitch embraces some aspects of the ethical consumerism movement, but it is clear that his concern has some limits: ‘...I consume organic, fair trade coffee but...I don’t mind strawberries in January and that sort of thing, you know...’ (Mitch). For some other informants, as we have seen in the gift section, consuming strawberries in January is a symbol for the globalisation of food production, and the environmental problems that it causes, added to the changes in consumption. Mitch is clearly aware of that but does not see it as a contradiction to his ideas about ethical consumption.

Hazel has been a member of Christian Aid and she has been active in various fair trade campaigns. She explains how she got interested in fair trade:

I have been a Christian Aid supporter and worked in Coventry Cathedral with the fair trade network...so I think actually it is nothing to do... it is not ‘I am ripe for feeling a sense of injustice’ because of feeling unfairly treated by virtue of being younger and being a girl when growing up... and then here I am, [someone] who meets somebody who says there are a lot of injustices in this

world and I find he is doing something about it and I fell in love with him. Here is a natural outlet where I can do something about it. I think that is what it is, I mean of course I believe in it. And also I think I do believe in the possibility of change as well, I couldn't be a psychotherapist if I didn't believe in the possibilities of change in one's heart because I was brought up pretty conservative, apolitical, conservative. I guess I would have voted Conservative in the elections. So meeting Michael was absolutely seminal in unleashing in me huge changes in myself, [...] just see the world differently and want to do something about it and that's all really. (Hazel)

Holly brings up another important part of the campaigns, which is not only about raising awareness on ethical issues within individuals but also about how these issues get talked about and discussed throughout the network of friends and families:

I have belonged to the Coventry and Warwickshire Fair Trade Network...buying in fair trade shops, it tells me that my money will go to people in countries where there is a lot of poverty, if I buy in the High Street here in Leamington that is not Friends of the Earth or Traidcraft I know that my money will go to some big organisation that already has a lot of money. But also I know that Friends of the Earth they are ethical, they have environmentally ethical sound standards whereas if I buy for instance from a place from the High Street you know the dyes they might have used for their clothes maybe is very bad for water and earth, I trust much more on Friends of the Earth to take care of that. It tells me something about where the product comes from, that the money will go to the people who are, who are poorer than I am, that will go towards... yeah...Environmental issues in things like you know using washing up liquid that is environmentally friendly, I have a friend in Warwick who I thought didn't have a good washing up liquid and I told him. (Holly)

The informants became interested in ethical consumerism through different routes and their relationship with the movement also varies. There are different degrees of involvement regarding experiences and actions but they have in common a wide knowledge about environmental, health and social issues. Their concerns go beyond individual awareness about any particular health scare, such as spraying fruits with pesticides, and get translated into careful research and selection of products and

shopping sources. Some of them have been members of organisations and have campaigned directly about fair trade and other social issues. Some of them are members of organisations and receive information about ethical issues and the use of their consumer power.

As we have seen in the gift section, the informants have a very close relationship with flowers; they search for, buy, give, receive, display, and are surrounded by flowers. Flowers are present in their social and personal relations with friends and families. Given their involvement in ethical consumerism, we might expect them to be knowledgeable about the cut flower campaign. The next part of the chapter deals with their different degrees of awareness and knowledge, first of the flower trade in general and then of the ethical initiatives on flowers.

Where do the flowers come from?

The informants listed two main sourcing countries from which they knew or imagined that the flowers they buy and use come from, which were England and Holland. According to Goody (1993), England has had a long and passionate relationship with flowers; he adds that not long ago England was self sufficient regarding flower production. Flowers have been grown in the back and front gardens of houses and in allotments, but there is also a long tradition of flower markets in English town and city life (Goody, 1993). Some of the informants seem to think that England still produces the flowers that are consumed there.

England and Holland

Michael does not hesitate to name the place where he bought flowers and to point out that he knows where the flowers come from: 'I rang this company in Jersey called Flying Flowers. They grow their flowers in Jersey and fly them in polystyrene boxes, first class...' (Michael). He shows not only that he knows where the flowers come from but also demonstrates knowledge about that place: 'Jersey has a major industry, it is almost like a subtropical climate, microclimate, Jersey is covered by flowers, strawberries, potatoes always weeks ahead from us...' (Michael).

When we continued talking about other occasions on which he has bought flowers, he explained that:

I hadn't got much going in my garden at the time and I got a bunch of roses, we were in season so I assumed they were probably English roses, in the shop they had no idea where they were from and they weren't this kind of specially grown or whatever, they were proper roses like the ones you grow in your garden, I like these, I prefer them to things that have been flown... (Michael)

He remarks that he might have asked because he says that 'in the shop they had no idea where they were from' but based on the recognisable qualities of the 'proper' flowers he assumed that they were English. For Michael to think that the roses are English amounts not only to the idea of good quality and freshness: 'proper roses' but it is also associated with 'good practices' environmentally.

Nevertheless, when we get to another occasion when he has bought flowers, he remembers that he has done so through Interflora and then he loses track of where the flowers come from:

Sometimes, I have certainly bought Interflora in the past, and Interflora might not be aware...Interflora is just a network of florists around the country, around the world and they operate kind of in a rota system, you basically pay your local florist and the money turns up at the florists near where the recipient is. I don't know where these flowers come from, anywhere in the world, it could be like the flowers you get on the garage fore-court, dripping with pesticide, damaging workers...I don't know. (Michael)

Michael acknowledges that he does not know much about the flowers traded by Interflora and assumes that Interflora themselves are not in a position of knowing about it either because of the globalised nature of the trade. However, having absolved Interflora of responsibility he starts bringing out the dichotomies between the 'good' sources and 'bad' sources and gives the garage fore-court flowers as an example of 'bad' flowers. The bad reputation of garage fore-court flowers is an example of the power of media information and campaigning. At the beginning of the 1990s garages were listed as selling flowers with pesticides by the tabloids.

Holly explains her perceptions about where the flowers come from:

I have no idea where these flowers come from and like when I bought the lily I didn't ask, and also until you said it today I was totally unaware that there was such a big flower trade and that you know, the working conditions of people in that, and that there are environmental issues as well. I didn't know that. I imagine that the Casablanca lily comes from Casablanca! [laughs] well, I imagine that Sainsbury's and Tesco's probably somewhere in England and probably abroad as well, that I come to think now I haven't thought about it, probably got vast areas with greenhouses, here and maybe abroad too I would have thought abroad too, and they employ people abroad and I don't know that but I imagine that. The flowers from the supermarkets, the flowers from the

florist shops I know that they are imported from Holland, because I see the big lorries when they park by the shop. Probably most of the flowers in England are imported from Holland. (Holly)

Holly openly recognises that she had not thought about the origins of flowers and it was not an issue to her before our conversation. She separates the sources of flowers into supermarket sources from England and elsewhere and florist sources from Holland, but ends up thinking that ‘probably most of the flowers in England are imported from Holland’. It appears that mentioning the direct involvement of Tesco and Sainsbury’s in the production, guarantees for her less ‘badness’ of the flowers. She seems to rely on Tesco and Sainsbury’s to ensure that there are not bad practices involved in their flower production. Regarding florists, in her view the flowers they sell come from Holland and Holland is not commonly associated with ‘bad’ practices in flower production.

Another informant, Hazel, uses flower appearance to imagine where the flowers come from:

Do you ask in the shop?

No, I think I make assumptions. I make assumptions that say a bunch of chrysanthemums which is sitting there and got a tie around it and so on is more likely to be grown by a local nursery than something that is wrapped in cellophane and these sort of motley collections of all sort of flowers, which are probably being imported from Holland or something like that. (Hazel)

She distinguishes, as Holly and Michael do, between flowers grown locally and those coming from Holland. The more simple and unpretentious the wrapping, the more she assumes the flowers to be local flowers, whereas more elaborate

cellophane wrapping indicates for her that they have been grown for commercial purposes and to attract attention and therefore they must come from Holland.

As for where she buys flowers, Hazel explains her choice of flower outlets thus:

Where do you tend to buy flowers?

I tend to buy them in the local shop that sells them. If it is convenient to do so I'd get them from Marks and Spencer orno, not Tesco's, Marks and Spencer on the grounds that the flowers seem to be very fresh and last for a long time. That's my experience [of] the ones that have been given to me or that I had given to other people and they said that they lasted, lasted, lasted.

And do you know where these flowers come from?

No. I never ask those questions, I never seem to ask that. (Hazel)

She trusts Marks and Spencer specifically regarding quality, reassured in terms of the freshness of the flowers. Hazel's trust in the quality of the flowers that M&S sells might be extended to the sourcing, since she is not compelled to ask where the flowers come from.

I raise the question again:

Just speculating, where do you imagine the flowers come from?

Well, without talking with you which obviously raises all sort of questions, I would think a local nursery or Lincolnshire, somewhere in England, or Holland, possibly Guernsey but I wouldn't think of them coming further than that...

Every type of flower or just these flowers

No, all the flowers I would assume coming from there, probably just a demonstration of my ignorance. I don't think of them coming from wherever else they do come from. I don't think about where they come from, when you ask me, [that] is where I guess they come from. (Hazel)

Hazel assumes then that flowers come from England or Holland, and even though she is aware now that flowers might come from other places, following the

hierarchies established by the others, these are 'ok' countries for flowers to come from. The flowers she buys, she assumes, are 'good' and therefore they must come from those two countries.

However, she is aware of the origin issue:

When you buy them you don't look at the label...
They wouldn't be labelled.

Not in Marks and Spencer?

Would they be? *I am asking...* yeah, yeah, I don't think so, they have the price on, they have a little thing with flower food, they have the instructions on how to care for them and where you should put them during the day. I have never noticed anything saying where they come from. I don't know if they do. (Hazel)

Hazel has had a look at the labels and knows that the source is not written there, that they would have the price, the food, instructions and placement but not the country of origin. She is certain that the bunch of flowers would not be labelled with the source information. Perhaps, if they were labelled, it would put more responsibility on the side of the consumer to choose which countries they would buy from. As it is, for Holly, Hazel and Michael, the responsibility lies on the side of the supermarkets to ensure that they know from whom and under what circumstances they source.

Intermediaries such as the supermarkets and Gaia play an important role for these informants in ensuring the credentials of the products they buy. The *Ethical Consumer* magazine is another kind of intermediary that gives them advice about ethical investment and financial management. The extent of separation between the issues of ethical consumption and the international flower trade is illustrated by Ash:

Where did you buy them?

At...at Oxfam.

And you order them or went there...

It was completely...it was completely on the spur of the moment, I just went to get something and it was easy to get some flowers...oh! there was a florist on the way to Oxfam, so it was convenient and I didn't think about it too much...[laughs] (Ash)

Earlier, when listing the reasons for buying ethical and fair traded products to give as gifts, Ash said that he needs to know where and how the gift is produced. Knowing the how and where adds more meaning to the gift and buying fair traded products gives him the assurance that he is not supporting bad practices. Here however, he states that 'I didn't think about it too much'. He does not need to think too much because it is an impulse buy and as we saw earlier he buys the flowers for his mother. He might choose not to think about the possibility of getting a problematic gift for his mother and prefers to assure himself that he bought the flowers from Oxfam, therefore stating that being from Oxfam they could not possibly be 'bad'. When he realises that Oxfam do not sell flowers he remarks that it was on his way to Oxfam and that even though the flowers were not bought in the Oxfam shop they were bought on his way to doing something 'good'. By extension this action cancels out the possible 'badness' in the unknown origin of the flowers.

'South America' vs. Holland

The other source that the informants listed was 'South America', referring to the continent in general rather than any country in particular. Virginia for instance comments that:

Do you look at where it comes from?

hmm hmm, yes, I do, yes, yes, nearly always. Partly because I am interested, partly because if I was going to buy organic and there was organic from this country or...even local area I would much prefer to buy that than from a long way away. (Virginia)

Why?

Because I want to support the movement here, I want to support local people and also because of the ridiculous transportation costs, because of the pollution of getting from South America to here you know it is extra air traffic. (Virginia)

Her initial concern about buying flowers from 'South America' is environmental.

However, she also comments about labour issues regarding production:

And the flowers that you buy in the flower shop, do you know where they come from?

I don't really know, I mean. I have been very reluctant to buy flowers in the supermarkets since I heard that a lot came from South America and that people, women in particular, suffered from pesticides and all that kind of stuff that I have read or heard, but I don't ask, I haven't ever asked in that shop where the flowers come from. (Virginia)

For Virginia the 'bad' practices have now moved from obscure garage shops to enter the supermarkets. She does not ask in the florists where the flowers come from but she says that she has asked the supermarkets:

Have you asked the supermarkets?

Yes, I did. I tried hard about that, I went and I really wanted a bunch of flowers and I thought I must ask. So I did once ask. The particular flowers that I wanted they went and checked, they didn't...you know I can't remember if the ones that I wanted were ok for me to buy or not ok, I can't remember if I bought them or if I didn't buy them. If they had said they were from Holland I would've bought them, if they said they were from South America I wouldn't. And I really can't remember and they came back with an answer. It's about a year ago. But I have never asked in the flower shop, I know that they have deliveries from Holland but I mean do Dutch flowers always come from Holland or do they also import from South America? They buy lots through the auctions. Right, so that's always kind of conned me, I've always kind of look 'oh Dutch florist! Must be Dutch flowers!' that's interesting, could be anywhere. You see that's naïve, I always thought that if it says Holland the flowers are from Holland, yeah. (Virginia)

A boycott on 'South American' flowers has been the least desirable goal of the campaigns; however, the first informant who mentions knowing that flowers come from this part of the world, also mentions that she is not willing to buy flowers produced in South America. The other side of the campaign, the one that tries to persuade customers to exercise their purchasing power in asking the big retailers, such as supermarkets, to change conditions in the supplier chain has not persuaded Virginia to act. On the contrary when she chooses to boycott 'South American' flowers, the campaigns argue, she might be jeopardising the opportunities for improving the standard of living of the workers.

Mitch explains clearly the perception between 'good' flowers being from Holland and 'bad' flowers coming from 'South America':

...we don't really buy flowers from Gaia...I don't know what...I know these sort of flowers that are produced in South America and actually harm people when they are produced but I don't know where they are sold particularly, I guess maybe the shops of the garages. But if you buy flowers from a good shop you get them from Holland, I mean, this used to be probably better but I really don't have much information about that. (Mitch)

Having in mind these polarisations between what is a 'good' source and what is a 'bad' source allows Mitch to continue using flowers and claim that he buys from 'good' sources. Instead of trying to act to change conditions where the problematic flowers come from, the two informants with some knowledge about flowers coming from sources other than Holland and England stick to the safe road of assuming that getting flowers from Holland will exempt them from supporting 'bad' practices.

Mitch continues:

I am also aware that some of the flowers that are produced are not good, I mean, I am aware of it and it actually stops me. Sometimes when I buy flowers and they don't last very [long] I think they might have been produced artificially, but I am also aware that some of the flowers are produced with lots of chemicals and about the workers... so I am aware and I don't think it actually stops me, but I think it I would if I knew about it or if I went to a shop... if Gaia would sell flowers and I knew what they were, production was fine, it was good, I'd probably buy more flowers...(Mitch)

Mitch here highlights the need for a mechanism that confirms the already assumed polarisation between 'bad' and 'good' flowers. In the absence of a straightforward fair trade or ethical label for flowers that identifies the 'good' flowers, the informants rely first on their assumptions about labour and environmental conditions in countries such as Holland and England and second on the fact that this job is done by the retailers, be they Sainsbury's, Tesco, the auctions in Holland or Gaia.

Other sourcing countries

Heather, on the other hand has different ideas altogether about where the flowers come from. Her ideas about the international flower trade come from first hand experience:

And when you gave flowers to your father you got them from the garden?

No, that I bought, I bought it locally, and it had to be in a pot.

Did you [know] where they were grown?

No idea, it was a DIY store, I grabbed it...

Where do you think it came from?

Morocco came to my head

Morocco, why?

Yeah, Morocco. The only time I have really been affected by the cut flower markets, made me think of it, was when we were flying to the Canaries and coming into land, and it's very rocky, empty and dry country and suddenly right by the airport are these fields with carnations in the open air and it was so incongruous, it just did not belong. But of course they are right by the airport because of cutting flowers and flying them on. I thought this is crazy but I saw a man and I thought 'hang about, that gives him a job' [laughs]. Maybe five fields but they were sort of international trade... (Heather)

Summary and conclusion

The ethical consumers use flowers as gifts in very sophisticated ways and they tend to associate them with positive values of creating and maintaining friendships and relationships. Cut flowers are used by the group to express positive feelings demonstrating an extensive and detailed knowledge of flowers and a familiarity with their 'appropriate' uses. Nonetheless, they seemed to be constructing their 'taste' in flowers in opposition to the traditional 'language of flowers'.

However, in spite of the detailed knowledge of the meanings and uses of flowers that the informants command, flowers do not appear as a high priority on their ethical trade agenda. They have varying degrees of knowledge about the cut flower industry but the key assumptions for many are that England, the Channel Islands and Holland are the main sources of cut flowers, that supermarkets might be in direct production of flowers and that flowers associated with Holland are produced in Holland. However, the interviews were not carried out as one way conversations and through the discussions we had before the interviews and during the interviews, the informants were able to engage with and work through these assumptions.

The informants who have some knowledge about the cut flower trade make assumptions about flowers from South America being ‘bad’ and therefore boycott them. They do not seem to be putting pressure on the retailers to change practices along the chain and are taking the less favoured alternative of boycotting what they *perceive* to be ‘South American’ flowers.

There seems to be a failure from the campaigns in putting across their messages about connecting the commodity and the gift, as well as informing the consumer at the same time that they need her/him to act. There is little knowledge about the aims of the flower campaigns amongst the ethical consumers.

There is a tendency by the informants to rely on intermediaries such as Gaia, the supermarkets and ethical magazines to do research on the sourcing of the products, and then act upon this information:

Of course they save me work because there are ethical principles and they are fine with me. They don’t just make sure where they source from, no?...they carefully check that they are not using exploitative ways and so on, but they also look at what companies are involved... they are very thorough, much more scrupulous than I am on their research, I trust them, I let them do the consciousness keeping for me...(Michael)

Several informants present contradictions between their politics and their lives as consumers. Virginia summarises their anxieties and expectations:

I am very aware that I am very ...it’s a real mixture because I hate all that but I am very [much a] consumer, you know, I was thinking about that when I was sitting in the bath before you came. I feel quite ashamed in a way to be part of

this western society where we are so consumer, consumer [oriented] but I do, I love shopping, I actually enjoy going to supermarkets [laughs] if I got time I love just looking around and buying different things! Not if I am in a hurry or if it is very crowded but I do love shopping! (Virginia)

The social relations that cut flowers sustain as gifts for the ethical consumers are mainly synonymous with intended expressions of care, love, friendship, devotion, gratitude and solidarity, among others, and it makes it difficult to associate the flowers that sustain or disrupt these relations with stories of exploitation, discrimination and bad labour practices. This is the case even for this group of customers that are so strongly committed to their politics of ethical consumption.

Chapter 6: ANALYSING CORPORATE RESISTANCE AND CO-OPTION OF ETHICAL TRADE CAMPAIGNS

Introduction

As we have seen in chapter 1, the aims of the cut flower campaigns are to raise the awareness of the consumers in the North about working conditions and living standards of the workers in the producer countries and to translate this consumer awareness into consumer pressure to persuade the retailers and importer companies in the North to analyse their supplier chains and take action. It was expected that the supplier companies in the South would enter into a dialogue with the Northern retailers and the flower campaigns, followed by the implementation of processes that would allow them to comply with the rules and regulations contained in the International Code of Conduct (ICC).

There have been various responses from Northern retailers in different countries and also from suppliers in the South. In the North, the Swiss supermarket chains Migros and Co-op, for example, embraced the ICC and initiated different pilot projects with their cut flower suppliers in countries such as Zimbabwe. The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) in Britain did not include flowers in its top pilot projects in China, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Only in the year 2002 was the issue of cut flowers taken up by one partner organisation of the ETI, Women Working Worldwide. They have been taking part in meetings and conferences around cut flower production in Kenya and they have brought some issues to the ETI regarding working conditions

in the Kenyan farms that supply supermarkets in the UK. There have been discussions among the members of the ETI about the way to extend the debates and include other countries and regions such as Colombia.

In the South, far from the anticipated dialogue with campaigners and Northern retailers, there have been various responses to counteract the impact of the campaigns. A range of discourses have been mobilised and action undertaken to this end. These have materialised in the form of two ethical trading initiatives: in Kenya, the Kenyan Flower Council analysed by Hughes (2001) and in Colombia the *Florverde* (Green Flower) programme created by *Asocolflores* in 1996.

In this chapter I analyse the Colombian response, using secondary material from *Asocolflores*, newspapers, magazines and internet articles and data from interviews in Colombia with *cultivo* owners, employees of *Asocolflores*, flower workers, NGOs and grass-roots organisation workers. I begin by analysing the discourses mobilised by *Asocolflores* during the past decade, the context in which their responses to the campaigns in the form of *Florverde* needs to be understood. Then I will analyse the responses to the campaigns by members and employees of *Asocolflores* and see if and how the individual discourses they deploy contest or reinforce the institutional discourses of the Association. The next section will move to the arguments that sustain the creation of the institutional response of *Asocolflores* to the campaigns: the *Florverde* programme. I will compare its contents with the ICC and analyse one of its social programmes, *Cultivemos la paz en familia*. The chapter ends by looking at the workers' perceptions of *Florverde*.

‘To save Colombia from cocaine, buy its roses’¹

A central *Asocolflores* discourse revolves around the quantity and quality of employment that the cut flower sector provides to the Colombians and the ‘clean’ alternative it offers to cocaine production. This discourse however, takes different forms and emphasis depending upon the public that it is directed to, and the issue in question. When talking to the North American public/consumers/media, *Asocolflores* talks about ‘workers’ in general to uphold its ‘flower versus cocaine’ arguments. In Europe, mainly Britain and Germany, instead of the ‘only alternative to drugs’ discourse, they use the environment and gender, themes that they have perceived to be of interest to the consumer/public/media in Europe. However, this approach changed recently when the European Union decided to withdraw tariff preferences to Colombian flowers, arguing that they had become too competitive and therefore the producers did not need the tariff advantages. *Asocolflores* then used its ‘flower versus cocaine’ argument in the European context (Colombia.com, 2003). In 1997, acting on the possibilities of trade sanctions against Colombia by the USA because of its failure to control coca production, *Asocolflores* focused on employment. *The World Paper Online* reproduces an article by Lourdes Molina from the Colombian newspaper *La Republica*. The article is directed to both the Colombian government and the US government, reminding them that if sanctions are imposed on Colombia, the industry would suffer and as a consequence hundreds of thousands of workers would risk losing their jobs. She makes a case for the expansion of domestic production in a nearly saturated market in the North and she also starts by praising the cut flower industry:

Judged by the amount of exports, Colombia's flower industry has the sweet smell of success. But the 125,000 people who, directly or indirectly, depend on flowers for their living know that roses and thorns go hand in hand...with the floriculture sector generating 75,000 jobs directly related to the cultivation of flowers, and another 50,000 indirect jobs, sanctions would seriously affect the country's economy. (Molina, 1997)

By the year 2000 the emphasis continued to be on employment in the cut flower sector, but this time not only as an instrument of development but also as an active strategy to counteract drug production. *Asocolflores* is lobbying to keep the tariff advantages of the Andean Trade Preference Act in the USA (ATPA), which allows Colombian flowers to be imported to the US tariff-free, saving producer companies from 5 to 7 per cent on costs. The ATPA concessions are rewards to countries that, according to the USA, are engaged in eradicating coca plantations and cocaine production. This time *Asocolflores* is talking to the North American public. *The Christian Science Monitor* (CSM) reproduces the *Asocolflores* discourses in the article 'Colombia's hope: less coca, more carnations'. The CSM states that:

Colombia's cut-flower industry now amounts to US\$580 million in annual exports and 150,000 jobs. This success comes after 30 years of hard work and investment –with a huge and growing market...Since passage of the Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPs) in 1991, Colombia's flower industry has employed thousands of people in rural areas who might otherwise have ended up working in illicit crops, industry officials say. (CSM, 2000)

Asocolflores also directs its efforts to the Colombian public, even though less than 5% of their production stays in the domestic market. The campaign is not directed to the consumers of flowers, but to enhance the perception that the public have of the industry as producing a 'clean' product that brings foreign revenues into the country. On the 30th July 2000, *El Espectador* Newspaper published an article with the title in Spanish: 'Flores o Coca? una alternativa a la sustitución de cultivos ilícitos'

(Flowers or Cocaine? an alternative for the substitution of illicit crops) (Gaitán, 2000) and close to Valentine's Day in February 2001 another article in *El Espectador* newspaper and in the Colombian airline *Revista Avianca* (2001) reminded the Colombians about the apparent alternatives: flowers or cocaine.

By the beginning of the year 2003, the cut flower producers needed to fight on two fronts: the ATPA preferences in the USA and the threat of 'upgrading' cut flowers to pay an import tariff in the European Union. *Asocolflores* continued lobbying the public and decision-making bodies in the USA. An article in the *Export America* magazine argues: 'that *licit* crop –fresh cut flowers - is a shining example of the hard work that Colombians are doing to combat the 'drugs and thugs' image that so plagues their country in the international business community' (Anglin, 2003, *emphasis in the original*). This time cut flowers are not 'another' alternative but 'the most successful alternative' to drug production: 'the flower trade has emerged as a globalization success story – arguably the most successful alternative to Colombia's violent drug trade' (Anglin, 2003). In the same article they shift again from the most successful alternative to the 'only' alternative to coca cultivation: 'while coca production continues to be a serious problem, ATPA trade preferences have helped strengthen Colombia's macroeconomic performance and have provided jobs for workers who might otherwise have participated in illicit coca cultivation' (Anglin, 2003).

In their lobby of the European Union, the issue of employment in cut flowers production versus cocaine production is presented again by Augusto Solano, the

Asocolflores president, in an article in Colombia.com and in a letter to Karl Friederich Falkenberg, director of the General Trade Direction of the European Commission. In Colombia.com, Solano stresses that ‘we insist that there has to be a co-responsibility in the drugs issue. The best way to help [us] is with trade opportunities...we are not asking for charity or gifts we are only asking for alternatives, free trade, the rest is our responsibility’ (Colombia.com, 2003 my translation).

In the letter to the director of the General Trade Direction, Solano emphasises the importance of the employment generated by the flower trade in Colombia in fighting drug production. He writes that ‘sector V, especially the cut flower segment, is precisely the one that offers most in terms of employment alternatives to illegal drug production activities undertaken in the countryside’ (Solano, 2003). Perhaps the issue of drugs alone does not seem to grab the attention of the international community anymore, therefore *Asocolflores* also updates its discourse to link drugs and terrorism; ‘removing the preferences now would send the wrong message to the people of Colombia and would strengthen the resolve of the terrorists, at a time when the ‘war on drugs’ is escalating’ (Solano, 2003).

Asocolflores want the Colombians and their potential consumers to associate cut flowers with the image of a clean alternative source of employment to coca production. *Asocolflores* deploy a set of binaries in which flowers are sweet, clean, shining and fresh, whilst coca production is, by implication at least, sour, dirty, tarnished and stale. Employment in flower production is licit, legitimate, legal and

earns honest revenues, whereas that in coca production is illicit, illegitimate, illegal, earning dishonest foreign revenues for Colombia.

As with any other discourse, this one can be read from different angles and in doing so, various geographical and gender contradictions/incompatibilities emerge. The first problem with the discourse that if workers do not work in flowers they will end up in coca production, is that most of the workers involved in cut flower cultivation are female household heads, whereas those involved in coca cultivation are either young single men or entire families. The migration history of the two groups also differs. As we saw in chapter 4, it is women migrants to the cities, mostly fleeing violence and a lack of economic opportunities in the rural areas, who end up working in flowers. The coca crop producers on the other hand, are mostly small agricultural producers who have been pushed to the agricultural frontier by big cattle ranch landowners who buy their land or use force to displace them deeper into the forest. There they begin the work of preparing the land for cultivation constantly at risk of being further displaced. In this cycle of cultivation and displacement, coca plants become the only financially viable crop (Molano, 1992a, 1992b).

A further problem with this argument is that the cut flower producer zone is located near Bogotá and Medellín in the Andean mountains whilst coca production mainly takes place in the Amazon forest and other places far away from those cities. However, *Asocolflores* continues using this discourse as a response to the campaigns. Meanwhile, the campaigns have also acted to uncover the other side of the 'clean' flowers image by questioning issues around labour standards. There are

other discourses, however, that help sustain the ‘clean’ and ‘licit’ image of flowers and I am going to turn to their analysis in the next part of the chapter.

Perceptions about the workers and the campaigns among *cultivo* owners and *Asocolflores* staff

The employees of *Asocolflores* and owners of *cultivos* whom I interviewed tend to emphasise the positive social role that flower production has in providing employment, mostly for women, and foreign revenues for the country in general. When confronted with the issues of the campaigns however, they tend to use negative constructions of working class people in order to shift the responsibility on to them. William, a *cultivo* owner starts by pointing out that:

They [the campaigns] have stigmatised us, as if we are endangering the environment. I don't think so, cut flower production has advanced a lot, I think it involves an intensive use of land and it has certain ecological costs but which crop doesn't have? We, flower growers, for economical reasons, we, the majority use pesticides in a very rational way and I don't want to blame anybody, but if you go and do research on how peasants who grow onions and potatoes use pesticides, they abuse pesticides and in what way, it's amazing! They think that the greater quantity you apply the better! Besides, we flower growers are able to pay for the latest, the new generation of pesticides which are the most advanced pesticides, very low toxicity or no toxicity at all, they are very expensive. The prices I have to pay! While a potato grower? They continue using the same products as always. The myth that flower growers are destroying *La Sabana* is just a bad reputation that they've given us and it has stayed like that...it is already there, and how are you going to get rid of it? Once you get stigmatised about something it just stays like that, it doesn't go away...I have been in the *cultivo* for more than ten years now and never, never, ever have I had a case of a worker being poisoned with anything, never, ever. I'm sure there must be some flower growers that handle their things very badly, I can't deny that, but the majority are very careful, because you just can't afford not to be! (William)

William defends the position of the cut flower producer by making a clear separation between ‘them’; (the workers and the campaigners) and ‘us’ (cut flower owners and

Asocolflores). In the above quote he contrasts owners with peasant producers, and, as we will see below, this set of constructions is also used to contrast owners with workers. William deploys the use of pesticides as an example through which to elaborate sets of value laden binary oppositions. The company owners and managers are constructed as ‘modern’ industrial producers who ‘know’ how to make rational use of tools that are products of scientific research and development. The peasant producers on the other hand, are constructed as ‘traditional’ pre-industrial producers, irrational and ignorant. They are seen as irresponsible users of ‘modern’ methods of production such as pesticides; they use them carelessly and to excess in ways that not only make their production inefficient but also dangerous to the environment. Capitalism is also valorised here – owners and managers are constructed as minimising risks because of the competitive ethos; they cannot afford not to be as environmentally, economically and socially efficient as their competitors. They are image conscious and therefore they are aware that they need to act responsibly. This is the ‘reality’ that William counter-poses to the campaigners, whom he sees as stigmatising the flower growers unfairly.

Similar discourses are applied to the workers of the *cultivo*; this time William is the ‘modern entrepreneur and employer’ struggling against the efficiency problems posed by ‘backward employees’, as we have already seen in chapter 4:

[Workers] have a mentality that is not used to performing industrial tasks. In flowers, if you are going to be able to grow flowers, if you want to be a reliable supplier of cut flowers, you need to operate under standards and routines that the peasants are not ready for...they are not used to following, to doing. The Colombian peasants are used to improvising, they do what comes! They do what they have to do for today and then to change this mentality of improvisation to the planned things, to the normalised processes is not easy! It

isn't easy! You have to fight against this culture; you have to transform them into rural operatives. (William, *repeated from chapter 4*)

The set of oppositions that William uses here construct the workers as former peasant producers who are undisciplined, haphazard and happy-go-lucky. This apparently renders them incapable of operating under standards and routines, causing a big headache for the entrepreneurs, who are reliable, disciplined, and good at planning and establishing routines needed to follow standards and grow cut flowers successfully. The entrepreneur is seen as everything the workers are not, and faces a big 'social' task in changing this 'peasant mentality' which is seen as the main obstacle to achieving efficiency in production and 'modernisation'. Kabeer reminds us of the parallel with modernisation theory:

Modernization implies the 'total' transformation of pre-modern societies: their institutions, their cultures and the behaviours they promote...while modernization theorists used different combinations of social and economic factors to explain the process of change, they generally shared a common emphasis on changes in values and attitudes as critical prerequisites for the transition to the modern society. They attributed the 'backwardness' of the Third World to the absence of the values associated with rational individualism, together with the socio-economic institutions through which such values could flourish and be rewarded. (Kabeer, 1994:16)

Having constructed workers as unreliable, ignorant and irrational, it is only a short further step to construct them as inadequate participants in any dialogue about how to improve standards in the industry – how can they possibly know what is best for them? Any workers' initiative, be it a union, association, or joining an ethical trading initiative, will be met with distrust by the entrepreneurs because the workers are not seen as 'ready', they have not been 'transformed' into the ideal industrial worker. So associating the campaigns with the workers is one way of trying to discredit them. In

response to the campaigns which posit the workers as the ‘victims’ of the industry, William puts forward the idea that it is the company owners and managers who are the real victims, unfairly stigmatised as they do their best to bring a ‘backward’ workforce into the modern era. As stated by Skeggs:

Most representations of working-class people contribute to devaluing and delegitimizing their already meagre capitals, putting further blocks on tradeability, denying any conversion into symbolic capital. When conversion is blocked positions of inequality are maintained. (Skeggs, 1998:11)

This opposition between benevolent owners and managers and malevolent campaigners is furthered by other respondents on the industry side. Lucie, another company owner, says that she feels angry because the campaigns in England and Germany do not know about the efforts they [the companies] are making in Colombia. When I told her I had worked with Cactus she said Marta [from *Asocolflores*] had told her that already. Lucie asked me what the objective of Cactus was, and when I said that in the years I had worked with them it was to do research in the flower sector, economic, social and environmental research for the workers, she asked then if Cactus and Cinep [Popular Education Research Centre] were responsible for the video *Amor, mujeres y flores* (Love, Women and Flowers) that in her opinion had done a lot of damage to the sector. Lucie considers that the campaigns’ objectives are to stigmatise the cut flower producers and cut flower production in general. She depicts the campaigners as prejudiced in that they do not want to be informed about what really happens in Colombia before organising the campaigns that bring ‘damage’ to the sector. She sees the campaigners as therefore irresponsible and conspiratorial. She sees the companies, meanwhile, as making

efforts to keep the industry going and to improve its conditions for workers who would ostensibly otherwise be working in the 'illicit' drug trade. Lucie resents the fact that the campaigners do not recognise the positive contributions that cut flower production makes to Colombian society.

Cristina, who is an employee in the legal section of *Asocolflores*, believes that the campaigns are part of an orchestrated initiative to discredit the Colombian flower sector. She raises a number of questions to elaborate her argument, asking why the campaigners do not report labour law violations when they know they are happening; why the campaigners are so active at periods of peak demand for the product such as Valentine's Day and Mother's Day, when nothing happens during the rest of the year; and why the campaigns create such a negative image of Colombia when the final consumer is more and more sensitive towards the social and environmental aspects of flower production and is likely to avoid Colombian flowers. She says she gets cross when campaigners say that there are medical problems caused by the flowers, asking where the evidence is to prove that flower production is a dangerous activity.

In Cristina's discourse the campaigners figure as orchestrators of smears based on misinformation, unwilling to back up their accusations with evidence and as malicious, aiming to inflict maximum damage by targeting Valentine's Day. They are seen as exploiting consumer sensitivity with one-off campaigns, careless about the damage done to the national interest and to the real interests of the workers.

In contrast the owners/managers are presented as having the best interests of Colombia at heart, providing valuable jobs that give women workers a chance to escape poverty and to modernise their ideas. While the owners apparently work tirelessly for the good of all, they are stigmatised by irresponsible campaigns that damage the whole economy. However, the damage to company profitability is never mentioned, the real gains and losses of being in the sector for the owners are not part of the debate, but subsumed to the wider economy, i.e. public gains or losses not private ones.

It is in the context of these discussions that the response of *Asocolflores* to the campaigns needs to be understood. *Florverde* has emerged as a strategic reply by the industry that seeks to protect the interests of the owners, although it is not of course presented in this light.

Responses of *Asocolflores*: *Florverde*

In the document that describes the history of *Florverde*, *Asocolflores* echoes the self-other perceptions detailed above:

During the first half of this decade [1990s] the Colombian flower exporters faced a dilemma. They had proved to be, as we have seen already, one of, if not the leading export sector in Colombia, creating over a hundred thousand direct and indirect jobs, mostly for women whose only opportunity to work had been as house maids for well-to-do families.

However, they had become the target of campaigns in some European countries which, rather than stressing their export success and the job creation which had come at the heels of their entrepreneurial ability, chose to point out several deficiencies in human resource management and chemical pesticide use. Much of the information used as a basis for these criticisms, it must be pointed out, was either [wrong] or simply misleading...It must be recognized that these negative campaigns had an impact, not least on the Colombian flower growers

themselves who were stunned by the press reports and newsletters that started circulating among the European public. (*Asocolflores*, no date: 7)

Asocolflores builds on a set of oppositions whereby the cut flower companies are providers of valuable employment offering women an escape from domestic service, and the campaigns are obsessed with the negative peddling of misinformation that damages the sector. Their perception is that the campaigners, rather than acknowledging the owner's entrepreneurial ability in providing jobs to women, have decided to single out 'deficiencies' in human resource management to stigmatise the industry. As Lucie, William and Cristina have illustrated before, *Asocolflores* sees itself as the victim of an unjustified smear campaign that nevertheless has had an impact on consumers. Doing nothing is not seen as an option, but the *Asocolflores* response is far from that desired by the campaigners:

The immediate reaction to join some of the just then appearing flower labels to offset this growing negative publicity was replaced by a sober and profound self analysis and self criticism. It was found that, even though there were some cases of inappropriate handling of the human factor and oversights when handling chemical pesticides, all in all the flower growing sector was keeping within the limits of the law.

However, they had to recognize that even though some members might have innovated in human resource management, pesticide spraying techniques and adequate water usage, for the majority environmental issues were simply not part of their agenda. The sector was aware that the trend in many developed countries was that people were increasingly sensitive to environmental and social considerations when buying a product. And that offering products made under stricter environmental and social specifications could be good business. The way to go about it was, then, to make companies not only aware of this business opportunity, but to have them include the human element and the environment as new business functions, just like marketing, finance or production. In this way these concerns would become the subject of a constant effort to improve. (*Asocolflores*, no date: 8)

Asocolflores continues building the case for the companies. As opposed to irresponsible, conspiratorial campaigners with an unwillingness to back up their accusations with evidence, *Asocolflores* presents its members as willing to engage in self-criticism and reform of practice where necessary. However, any reform is not going to be in the context of a fair/ethical trade flower label, which would be subject to external monitoring and verification and would include the participation of workers in its conception. The binary oppositions set up between *Asocolflores* members and workers, and *Asocolflores* members and campaigners, allow them to see the problems of the industry highlighted by the campaigners as a case of a) ‘a few bad eggs’ – cases that are not representative of general practice as presented by Farné (1998), b) errors that can be corrected, or, especially c) deficits in the workforce, due to their ‘peasant mentality’, ignorance and lack of rationality. No scope is allowed for the problems to be understood as the exploitation of labour by capital, whereby labour rights need to be enhanced. Instead there is to be a ‘home-grown’ solution:

One of the shortcomings of simply joining a flower label, it was seen, was the fact that compliance with certain requirements did not promote a culture of continuous improvement among flower growers: it was something that would be done once and that would be the end of it. So what started off as studying how to react to negative press releases ended as the quest for a new market opportunity. The decision was taken to research what had been done in other countries to take advantage of this new trend. (*Asocolflores*, no date: 8)

Here *Asocolflores* constructs the campaigns and label initiatives as one-off events, static over time, and constructs itself as seeking ongoing improvement, the latter clearly accruing more value in the discourse. It is also very clear that the response is

organised around increasing market opportunity which becomes the central driver and rationale. An example in the Dutch flower industry proved of interest:

One of the most interesting examples was found in Holland, where the *Milieu Project Sierteelt* (MPS) [Floriculture Environment Project] had starting (sic) working with flower growers on the basis of data. The concept was simple: caring for the environment is essentially a matter of keeping records. If you record your consumption figures you will reduce the burden on the environment. For the Colombian flower sector this program had many advantages. In the first place it was a flexible program, changing with changing needs and conditions. Secondly, it had a competitive element, with certain nurseries showing the way through better cultivation methods. Thirdly, it was a self-managed system where flower growers themselves had to take the initiative to participate and improve their working habits to suit the new environmental conditions. In fourth place, the fact that it was based on statistics made the program free of any subjective evaluations. (*Asocolflores*, no date: 8)

The key ingredients for the type of scheme imagined by *Asocolflores* can be readily identified: careful documentation and record-keeping; management from within the industry only; the flexibility to contract or expand the scheme depending on market conditions; the ‘objectivity’ of statistics with which to counter future campaigns; the promise of competitive advantage through participation and an emphasis on the environment rather than labour rights. On this latter point the MPS was designed by companies that form part of the Dutch auction market and, more than a code of conduct, it comprises environmental guidelines for sustainable production. To be fair, *Asocolflores* recognised that some ingredients were missing from the MPS model:

However, two important aspects were missing: the program the Colombians were looking for had to **include the human factor**. It was necessary to have a chapter on how the farms were dealing with their employees, and how they could better their human management techniques. Secondly, there had to be a **training element** in the program because it was necessary to jump start the effort and not leave the whole initiative in the hands of the flower growers. It was therefore decided that it was not possible to participate in any of the

existing environmental programs of labels, and that the flower growers would have to start their own program to suit their particular needs.

Florverde was started in October 1996 with the following definitions:

An integrated strategy to optimize the use of resources, with a long term view to improve profitability of the Colombian flower growers, within the concept of sustainable development. (*Asocolflores*, no date: 8, *emphasis in the original*)

Asocolflores presents *Florverde* as a coherent programme that integrates improvement with ‘good business practice’ and is backed by scientific methods. It is presented as more objective, more sustainable and more suited to the needs of the Colombian industry than any label initiative led by campaigners. It pays lip service to the needs of workers, but exchanges the language of labour rights and social justice for one of the ‘human factor’ in dealing with employees, and ‘better human management techniques’. Moreover, the privileging of environmental issues is very obviously signalled by the title, *Florverde: Green Flowers*. *Asocolflores* claims to have invested a million dollars in the programme. However, the document does not contain information about whether they undertook a process of consultation among the members of *Asocolflores* to agree on the contents of the programme and sub programmes or whether the programme was drafted by inside staff or outside hired experts.

Contents of *Florverde* vis a vis the ICC

In Colombia, *Asocolflores* has presented different versions of *Florverde* throughout the years since its origin. Some leaflets include only environmental aspects and others also include a small section on human resource management (see *Asocolflores* leaflets 1 and 2, no date - see appendix 7). In a document distributed to the European media, charities and financial institutions in the UK and Germany in 1998,

Asocolflores again presented its aims and goals regarding human resource management (*Asocolflores*, no date). Based on this document, I am going to compare the contents of the ICC with the aims and objectives of the human resource management element of *Florverde*.

The ICC is defined as a multi-stakeholder initiative developed by Southern and Northern NGOs and trade unions (Smith et al, 2003:5) following concerns and denouncements by NGOs, trade unions, academics and organisations about working conditions in the cut flower sector in Colombia at the beginning of the 1990s. The ICC agreement resulted after negotiation and consultation among both Southern and Northern groupings. In the South this involved the Southern NGOs such as Cactus, trade unions and grass-root organisations (which included the participation of cut flower workers) in Colombia and Ecuador. In the North it involved Northern NGOs such as the International Flower Campaign (supported by Bread for the World, FIAN and terre des hommes), OLAA - Organisatie Latijns Amerika Activiteiten, INZET, the Fair Trade Center, the Flower Coordination Switzerland and Christian Aid, and also Northern trade unions such as the IUF - International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations, the IG BAU - Trade Union for Construction, Agriculture and Environment, and FNV - Trade Union Confederation, in Germany, Switzerland and The Netherlands.

An agreement was reached in 1998 about the contents of the ICC and about the processes of monitoring and verification of its implementation. It includes ten core

issues around freedom of association, employment, environmental practices, health and safety, non-discriminatory practices, pesticide handling and child labour, all of which are non-negotiable.

As we have seen above the agreement on the contents and procedures of the ICC was the result of broad consultations and negotiations among numerous and varied stakeholders in the South as well as in the North. The multi-stakeholder nature of the ICC identified the ten core issues that are compared with the *Florverde* programme in the next section.

Labour rights

Issues around security of employment have been at the forefront of all campaigns involving export-oriented commodities. The ICC states that:

Work which is by its nature not seasonal or temporary shall be done by workers on permanent contracts. Provisions for non-permanent and seasonal workers, including freedom of association, should be not less favourable than for permanent workers. Every worker shall get a copy of their contract. (ICC, no date)

Meanwhile for *Asocolflores*, the main goals in personnel administration are: ‘100% compliance with existing [Colombian] legislation, and reduce worker turnover’ later on they continue explaining that ‘all workers have a contract’ (*Asocolflores*, no date: 14) but security of employment and the rights of temporary/seasonal workers are not mentioned.

Point two of the ICC, equality of treatment states that:

Workers shall have access to jobs and training on equal terms, irrespective of gender, age, ethnic origin, colour, marital status, sexual orientation, political opinion, religion or social origin (ILO Conventions 100 and 111). Physical harassment or psychological oppression, particularly of women workers, must not be tolerated. (ICC, no date)

Florverde for this part only states that ‘selection of personnel is non-discriminatory’ and that ‘the policy in all *Florverde* affiliates is equal payment for equal responsibility’ (*Asocolflores*, no date: 15). It therefore leaves out the enforcement of non-discriminatory practices within the workplace reflected in important aspects such as freedom from physical harassment and psychological oppression, and does not specify potential sources of discrimination.

Regarding point three, living wages, the ICC argues that:

Wages and benefits paid for a standard working week shall meet at least legal or industry minimum standards and always be sufficient to meet basic needs of workers and their families and to provide some discretionary income. Pay should be in cash, direct to the workers, promptly and in full. Information about wages shall be available to workers in an understandable and detailed form. (ICC, no date)

Meanwhile *Asocolflores* states that:

All *Florverde* farms pay salaries that are above the minimum legal requirement. Benefits usually exceed legal requirements, with subsidies given for home improvement, medical treatment, dental care, day-care centres, school materials and lunch, among others. Most firms have a doctor in house and sometimes a dental worker. (*Asocolflores*, no date: 15)

Both the ICC and *Asocolflores* fail to mention that by Colombian law it is compulsory to affiliate employees to a health scheme, be it state run or private, to ensure that the worker has medical coverage.

The ICC stipulates that the number of weekly hours that the workers should work:

Shall comply with applicable law and industry standards. In any event, workers shall not on a regular basis be required to work in excess of 48 hours per week and shall be provided with at least one day off every week. Overtime shall be voluntary, shall not exceed 12 hours per week, shall not be demanded on a regular basis and shall always be compensated at a premium rate. (ICC, no date)

Florverde on the other hand states that the ‘average working hours in the farms affiliated to the programme is 46.5 a week’ and that ‘women have the added benefit that working hours start very early, usually at 6.00 am, so they are usually home with their families by mid afternoon and can participate in household activities’ (*Asocolflores*, no date:15). Of course, knowing average working hours is no guarantee of labour rights regarding maximum hours of work.

For freedom of association the ICC demands that:

The rights of all workers to form and join trade unions and to bargain collectively shall be recognised (ILO Conventions 87 and 98). Workers’ representatives shall not be the subject of discrimination and shall have access to all workplaces necessary to enable them to carry out their representation functions (ILO Convention 135). (ICC, no date)

Florverde reports that ‘30% of all workers in the *Florverde* flower sector belong to a trade union and 40% bargain collectively. No relationship has been shown between trade union participation and product quality’ (*Asocolflores*, no date:15).

Regarding child labour the code states that:

There shall be no use of child labour. There shall be no workers under the age of 15 years or under the compulsory school-leaving age, whichever is higher. Children under 18 shall not work in hazardous conditions (ILO Convention 138). Adequate transitional economic assistance and appropriate educational opportunities shall be provided to any replaced child workers. (ICC, no date)

And *Florverde* states that ‘all the above covers contractors as well’ and continues that ‘although the law allows highering [sic] workers between 16 to 18 years old, efforts are made not to hire workers younger than 18 years old (*Asocolflores*, no date:16).

The issue of child labour or young labour has proven to be very complex. The ICC works within the framework of the enforcement of human rights, breaking down the global set of rights into particular guidelines to achieve wider aims such as the right to have access to education, health, food, shelter and a dignified job. Having that in mind, however, some Southern organisations have pointed out that in some instances these clauses could hinder more than protect the standard of living of the workers and their families, since it could be denying access to work to young persons who have also been denied the right to education. In an ideal world, children should go to school and then continue their education in university, without having to work for a living at the same time or to pay for their education. This ideal world is considered possible by millions of people that continue fighting for it as part of the general enforcement of all human rights for all.

However, there is also the need to protect children from hazardous work and, as I said, the child-labour clause is part of a general set of clauses to enforce human rights. Code of conduct campaigners uphold that none of the clauses are negotiable because one ensures the implementation of the others. For example, having a living wage, security of employment, access to medical attention and health and safety measures, is seen as contributing to the improvement of the standard of living of the

worker and her family, and enabling children to go school and to have the time to be children without having to start working for a living. However, things are not as straightforward as they seem; the work place is just one part of the life of the workers and their families and indeed, one of the criticisms of the code has been its centring of attention on the workplace and its lack of extension to the community. Certainly the issue of child labour raises more questions than it answers and it continues to be the subject of debate within ethical consumerism and labour movements in the North and the South.

Regarding occupational health, the ICC states that:

A safe and hygienic working environment shall be provided. Companies shall provide free and appropriate protective clothing and equipment, and comply with internationally recognised health and safety standards (ILO Convention 170). Workers and their organisations must be consulted, trained and allowed to investigate safety issues. There should be regular monitoring of workers' health and safety. Companies shall supply drinking water; provide clean toilets and offer showers and washing facilities. Where housing is provided, it should comply at least with the minimum standards for size, ventilation, cooking facilities, water supply and sanitary facilities (ILO Convention 110, Articles 85-88). (ICC, no date)

In contrast to this comprehensive set of rights, *Florverde*'s main goals are to have an Occupational Health Plan, to organize an Occupational Health Committee in every farm, to develop emergency and contingency plans and to have adequate sanitary and medical installations in farms (*Asocolflores*, no date).

An issue that *Asocolflores* does not mention is forced labour. For the ICC, 'there shall be no forced labour, included bonded or involuntary prison labour (ILO

Conventions 29 and 105). Nor shall workers be required to lodge "deposits" or their identity papers with their employer' (ICC, no date).

Florverde merely reports practice and does not stipulate any rights of the workers. Trade union membership/participation is presented not in the context of labour rights but product quality.

Pesticides and chemicals

The ICC states that:

Every company should assess the risks of the chemicals used and apply measures to prevent any damage to the health of their workers. Companies shall record and reduce pesticide and fertilizer use by adequate techniques and methods. No banned, highly toxic (WHO I) or carcinogenic pesticide and chemical should be used. Safety instructions and re-entry intervals must be strictly observed and monitored. Spraying, handling and storing pesticides and chemicals should be done by specially trained people with suitable equipment. Stores, apparatus and equipment must be clean, safe, handy and conforming to international standards. (ICC, no date)

And in terms of the general protection of the environment, the ICC considers that 'companies should make every effort to protect the environment and the residential areas, avoid pollution and implement sustainable use of natural resources (water, soil, air, etc.)' (ICC, no date)

It is interesting that there is a 'change of addressee' as the *Asocolflores* document move from labour to pesticides and chemicals. The section on labour is clearly addressed: a) to the campaigners and to the Northern listeners and b) to the workers. The section on pesticides and the environment seems to be addressed firstly to the

cut flower companies themselves. Unlike the labour sections which largely restrict themselves to describing [best] practices, this section is more monitoring and prescriptive in tone. It tells companies what they ought to be doing. *Asocolflores* goes to great lengths to explain the aims, goals, objectives as well as the strategies and processes to achieve their goals in the environmental arena. These comprehensive sections address specialised themes and give a very clear picture about the knowledge that the *Florverde* creators have of what the environmental standards should be, as well as the steps needed to improve their technologies and practices to achieve these standards. Several examples given in the document also show the willingness of the company owners and management to experiment with these new techniques and practices.

The document gives an example of innovation in spraying techniques through the collection of data and observation of the *operarios*. They point out that after some improvements in pest management in a farm:

There remained, however the problem of spraying operator contact with chemical pesticides. Even though operators were using adequate uniforms and masks, occupational health workers noticed that they were always spraying and then walking through a chemical pesticide cloud. With the help of these operators a new vertical spraying arm was designed and initially attached to the side of the operator, allowing him to work without holding the spraying arm. Soon thereafter, this vertical spraying arm was fixed to the back of the operator, using a kind of harness with a suitable design and weight, and in this way, chemical pesticide spraying was done behind the operators, thus keeping them and their uniforms out of the spraying cloud. (*Asocolflores*, no date:17)

Such initiatives are obviously to be applauded, but in response to a reporting of them that celebrates the technological innovations of *Asocolflores* members, we might ask

why it took so long and how many workers had their health impaired before owners and managers took notice.

Monitoring and verification

The majority of trade unions, NGOs and other organisations that have taken part in the ethical consumerism movement, agree that the contents of the Code are important, but there is also unanimous consent that a code is worth nothing if there are not credible monitoring mechanisms to implement it, independent bodies to monitor the implementation and independent control over the verification of the whole process.

The ICC states that:

1. To overview the implementation of the Code of Conduct an independent body, accepted by all parties involved (for example trade unions, NGOs, employers), shall be formed.
2. This body will set the terms for an independent process of verification of compliance with the Code of Conduct.
3. The companies shall report regularly about the progress made in the implementation of the Code.
4. The independent body shall make provisions for workers, trade unions and other concerned groups to lodge complaints about violations of the Code, which if serious, have to be followed-up.
5. The Code shall be translated into local languages and prominently displayed in the place of work. (ICC, no date)

Asocolflores in turn explains that for them:

An important aspect of *Florverde* which must be pointed out is that it does not require certification by third parties... how, one might ask, does the program guarantee the validity of its results?

There are three important instruments for this. The first is the Recording System. All items on the checklists are objective, and most are quantitative, so they are easily verifiable if in doubt. If one member decided to report misleading data, he might get away with it for one period, maybe two. But after this, the system itself would point out the historical changes in the firm's data, and *Florverde* personnel would investigate to find out what has been done to improve results. The second is benchmarking, which acts as a promoter of competitive spirit within the group, and also as a controlling mechanism to assure that the reported results are in reality achievable. Thirdly, the *Florverde* experts are there, not only to train farms on social and environmental techniques, but also to verify the validity of reported data. (*Asocolflores*, no date:13)

Asocolflores states that its programme does not require certification (or monitoring and verification) by third parties. Its explanation is that all the items on the checklist are objective, and most quantitative, so easily verifiable if in doubt. Is it that they consider social aspects to be easily verifiable or objective, or that they are only recording the environmental aspects of the programme?

In the part dedicated to human resource management, *Asocolflores* starts by addressing similar issues to those included in the ICC, although it uses different language to refer to these same issues. While the ICC asks for enforcement of the different points mentioned, *Asocolflores* describes some of the characteristics of their farms and extends them as examples of their outstanding qualities. It does not address the issues as compulsory for all members of the programme to implement. The language, therefore, shows differences regarding the emphasis and understanding of the extent of the responsibilities of the companies, and from there it

progresses to a total disagreement with the ICC over issues related to aspects of monitoring and verification.

In the section on human resource management *Asocolflores* presents its aims and goals in the form of examples of practices in their ongoing programme. However, this does not include statements as to the minimum standards to achieve and ways of reaching them. They present their aims and goals as things that have already been achieved by the farms that are part of the *Florverde* programme, which is odd given their insistence on the need for continuous improvement. Such an insistence also seems quite incompatible with the failure to set targets or guidelines for future achievement. While they argue that the human factor is central to the *Florverde* programme, the space dedicated to it takes only six pages in a document of 38 pages (*Asocolflores*, no date). The section on the adequate use of pesticides, however, looks very different. Not only are almost 20 pages dedicated to pesticides, water usage, residues, soil and fertilization, there are comprehensive goals and aims set, as well as strategies to achieve them and procedures about better practices.

Florverde translates the broad spectrum of aims around employee welfare and training to focus on aspects that are not included in the ICC: to develop a welfare programme which addresses workers' needs, to develop programmes which promote self esteem and confidence and to develop programmes that work on conflict management at individual and family levels (*Asocolflores*, no date). This latter is analysed in the next section.

The social programme of *Florverde: Cultivemos la paz en familia* (Let's Cultivate Peace in the Family)

As we saw earlier in the chapter, *Asocolflores* and the owners of the companies place the responsibility for environmental problems and deficiencies in the workforce on the 'backwardness' and 'improvisation' of the workers. The cut flower campaigns initially tended to focus more on environmental issues and although these do impact on the worker, recently social issues have been gaining equal importance with environmental aspects. *Asocolflores* is aware of this trend and recognises the need to address social issues within their *Florverde* programme. However the approach draws heavily on the binary constructed around 'backward' peasant production and modern capitalist production, as William explains:

In this macho society, especially at this cultural level, there is a lot *machismo*. And it is very complicated. Personally, I have a lawyer that gives advice to the company in all of these issues of abusive partners, but it is very difficult to change their habits, it is very difficult. The behaviour is changing, slowly. I see that it is worse among old people. For young women things are a bit more equal, it has been changing bit by bit. Because that [the job] gives more independence to women, before when the woman used to depend on her husband, he could abuse her and she had to put up with it. Not anymore, now the woman works and she can tell him 'I'll leave you because I can live alone and can look after myself'. But with this *machismo*, then the man intimidates the woman with violence and forces her to continue working for him, to stay with him. Then, we need to hire a lawyer, make the legal arrangements and see how they separate, and all these things. However, the cultural legacy is very strong, but not all are the same, not all men abuse women. I know some men that are very respectful and civilized. But in the majority of the relationships there is abuse, even when it is not physical abuse because to abuse women you don't need to hit them because there is also psychological abuse. (William)

The main issue for the workers is here presented not as their relations with capital but with one another; indeed, full entry into a capitalist mode of production is presented as the solution.

Marta, from *Asocolflores*, agrees with William and identifies the problems related to violence against women as critical problems in the sector. She says that even though women have possession of what they earn and employment has generated independence in decision making for women, in a macho community this independence is not welcomed. She argues that this situation generates resentment and conflicts between genders, but considers that the situation is improving. Lucie also says that it is very difficult to change a 200 year culture of violence, but that they have to promote among the workers the understanding that it is pleasant to be in a family where there is no shouting and abuse.

The three informants share some key ideas about the nature of the social problems affecting the workers. William singles out *machismo* as the main problem affecting the women workers, but a *machismo* specific to the working classes, which he describes as ‘at this cultural level’ or less ‘civilised’. He thinks that machismo and its resulting violence are characteristics inherent to working class men. His perception is that employment in cut flowers has the potential to benefit women workers because it has given them the possibilities of financial independence but has not yet trickled down because the working class men are still exploiting the women. The women are now working to maintain the ‘lazy’, ‘inefficient’ ‘backward’ working class men and they have to do it or face the threat of violence. Therefore,

violence and exploitation are characteristics that the informants associate with the workers, peasant producers and partners of the women workers. The image of themselves, is by contrast, of 'civilised' and 'concerned' persons that resort to the use of the law, not to violence, to solve problems that the workers themselves get into. There is resounding silence in terms of the exploitation that the campaigns focus on, namely the exploitation of labour by capital.

Given that owners/managers identify domestic violence as one of the critical problems affecting the women workers and that they are concerned about the difficulties of changing the workers' 'culture' and 'habits', it is perhaps no surprise that the remedies involve a strategy aimed at making good the 'deficits' of the workforce through training and welfare and 'conflict management'. The institutional response to what *Asocolflores*, through its members and staff, has identified as the main social problem is the programme '*Cultivemos la paz en familia*' (Let's Cultivate Peace in the Family). Lucie has been working closely with *Asocolflores* in the design and implementation of the programme and she is one of the co-authors of the workbook for the course. Conflict management is described as one of the employee welfare strategies within the *Florverde* document directed to the European public. In the introduction to the workbook *Cultivemos la paz en familia* it is stated that 'the programme was born out of the interest of the flower growers to make a contribution to the country's peace through the 75,000 workers in the sector and their families, opening a space for thinking about an adequate management of conflicts' (Monchaux de Velez, *et al*, 2000:1).

In another document by *Asocolflores* entitled *Asocolflores Seccional Cundinamarca – Boyacá para el Desarrollo Social* (Cundinamarca and Boyacá Offices of *Asocolflores* [working] for the Social Development of the Regions) from February 2001, *Asocolflores* states that there are 92 companies participating in the *Cultivemos* programme, and that 12 workshops had been held in *Asocolflores* and 30 more in the participating farms, adding to the training of 277 facilitators. They also mention that 77 companies had bought the training materials and that they had distributed 23,684 workbooks. There are 67 companies taking part in phase one of the programme and 34 in phase two, out of a total of 203 companies that are members of *Asocolflores* (*Asocolflores*, 2001b:3).

The programme, *Asocolflores* argues, is ‘for the flower workers who seek to facilitate conflict management within the family and the work place. It is designed to be implemented in every company by the employees in charge of human resource management or other people with a sensibility towards the theme and leadership within the groups’ (*Asocolflores*, 2001b:3). The inclusion of workplace conflict, elided with family conflict is telling, and will be returned to below.

The implementation of the *Cultivemos* programme is based on a series of workshops. In the first one, a group of approximately 15 workers are assembled, the facilitators talk to them about conflict and the different ways of solving it, and then they invite the workers to transmit what they have learnt to their families. A month later the group meets again and the workers are expected to share their experiences while the facilitators stimulate discussion and highlight worker behaviour that shows

respectful attitudes, acquiescence and peaceful ways of living. Then they move on to measure the outcomes of the programme with indexes that record and quantify situations generated by conflicts. *Asocolflores* advises every company to keep regular records starting before the beginning of the programme and they are required to send this to *Asocolflores* every three months so that the impact of the programme on the flower sector can be measured (Monchaux de Velez, 2000:1).

Explaining why this idea is fundamental within their social programmes, Marta² from *Asocolflores* comments that people need to identify conflicts, such as couples' problems, as something natural and part of their upbringing. She identifies the need to diagnose the origins of the conflicts such as absence of discipline or alcoholism. People, she argues, need to step into each other's shoes even though they think differently from each other. She also mentioned that the facilitators go to the farms and that they use a participative methodology in running the courses. Marta insists that they have had good attendance at the workshops and that the Universidad de La Sabana is doing an evaluation of the programme.

Lucie says that through the programme she has seen women who have been able to separate from their husbands. She also comments that the women workers have started to claim their own rights and that the women themselves say that they have changed in their relationships at home and even more at work and that the programme empowers women workers.

Cristina points out that the main concern of the Association is the welfare of the workers, and suggests that flower growing generates well being. She also argues that the cut flower sector is the first employer for unskilled labour in Colombia and if people work happily, productivity increases and that workers should be aware about their responsibilities [in generating wellbeing and peace], even though it sounds like a utopia or a lie, but they must be aware that they have a social responsibility.

The remedies addressed by *Asocolflores* through *Florverde* are targeted at what is perceived to be the 'main enemy', the 'backwardness' and traditional mentality of the workforce, through training, welfare and 'conflict management'. There is a subsidiary argument that recognises that the shift from peasant/domestic production to modern capitalist production and a different way of life creates many difficulties, therefore in true paternalistic fashion it aims to 'help' the main victims of this stress: women. The possibility that there is a conflict to be solved between the company and the worker is only briefly alluded to. The main concern of the *Florverde* programme is with the conflict between workers and their families. Moreover, eliding conflict within the family with conflict in the work-place and, by implication, in the country, neatly side-steps any material analysis of inequality, exploitation, or exclusion. The problem is reduced in all cases to the 'backward' culture of the working classes.

In Colombia such conflict resolution models and schemes have been used in a variety of scenarios ranging from trade union disputes and local government budget discussions to peace process negotiations between the former government and

FARC (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces) guerrillas. There are several types of conflict resolution programmes and several companies specialise in giving courses and advice on conflict management. The design of *Cultivemos la paz en familia* was based on the materials distributed by NEST, a company that also gives advice and courses on conflict resolution to regional and local governments. The idea is that all the conflicts, from domestic disputes to work-place claims to wars, can be solved by applying the right models of conflict management.

The concept of solving conflicts through the application of models and schemes, without researching and taking into account the social, political and economic origins of the conflicts, seems very problematic in the context of Colombia. The idea of making the individual responsible for managing some variables within their conflicts and solving their conflicts is unsatisfactory, because it denies social responsibility. As Cristina implies, if she or he does not do it, they can be constructed as contributing to the growing violence in the country. There is a tendency to see the political and social violence in Colombia as rooted in individual choices alone, such that if the workers ‘learn’ not to shout at each other and to be nice to each other the social problems, or what they consider to be the social problems within the sector, would disappear.

Experiences of women workers with *Florverde*

The issue of *Florverde* was brought up by Rosa, a worker, when we were talking about the presence of multinational companies in the cut flower sector.

Which multinationals are operating here then?

We have this one, the one of the green flowers, *Florverde* something? I don't remember now about the whole name... (Rosa)

Tellingly Rosa does not identify *Florverde* as a social programme that should be significantly improving her working conditions or that will protect her rights to freedom of association. The programme seems to be in operation in the farms because she has heard of it, but she sees it as another multinational not a body to guarantee minimum labour and environmental standards. She does not recognise it even as a welfare programme but as something that sounds as 'foreign' as a multinational. *Asocolflores* states that 30% of *Florverde* workers are members of unions (*Asocolflores*, no date); however, they do not clarify what type of union these are. As we have seen in chapter 4, Rosa works on a farm where one of the last independent unions, as she describes it, has been banned. She is one of the leaders of the union and at the time of the interview the leaders were still resisting company threats to first ostracise them in physically demanding jobs and finally to fire them. She talks about the problems involved in being part of an independent union in what seems to be a *Florverde* farm:

If I say to the women 'c'mon sign here, look with this we are going to improve our situation' and what if a woman is fired? Then she will come back and point at me saying 'this is your fault' and then she won't be hired again by another company, then I'll have a problem, you see? The only employment around here is flowers by now and the companies have their lists, they pass information to each other and then you are not hired anywhere else. At least me, if I want to go and work in another company I can't because I'm marked as a unionist and they won't hire me. You have to let two or three years pass without working with flowers and then try again and see, but this time the company won't hire me directly but through the *contratista*, once you are on their books you stay there. It is similar to what happens when you are accused of stealing and are pigeonholed as a thief, as a delinquent and they say 'this one no, she is a revolutionary' and they don't even say that anymore, they say 'this one is a *guerrillera*'. A friend of mine was working in the union with me and they fired her. She had to do small things around to earn a living, in a bakery and so on

and then when she went back to a company to ask for work they told her that she was a *guerrillera*...this is what happens when we work with the unions you are branded as a *guerrillera* in all the companies. (Rosa)

Amaranta, a worker and activist, also refers to what happens to the workers if they do not comply with the rules imposed by the companies:

The way the companies react to our work [trade unions and grass-roots organisations]... and it is still going on, is that the companies do not hire people from here, from these neighbourhoods. A case, for example, a young woman, she was asked if she had participated in the activities here and she said yes and then they did not hire her. Another woman was told that if she continued taking part in the exercises and things here she could kiss her job goodbye. Not even the smallest thing around here. The other day my sister went to look for work in the company and they received everybody from Bogotá and some other regions but nobody from around here. Then, I think it has to do with the work we do here, in one way or another they [the companies] find out about these processes and it has an effect on the workers. (Amaranta)

Violeta is not a permanent worker; she works with sub-contractors, *contratistas*; and these are her experiences with *Florverde*:

And do you have any training about occupational health? Or courses?
Maybe the company yes, they seem to meet but they don't give us any of that...

Not courses about violence against women or anything like that?
No, in the company as I said, to the people who have a contract with the company yes, I have heard that they have meetings and they tell them but us who are with the middle-men, they marginalise us, they don't tell us anything, don't do anything. We are second class citizens. Work is the same, that can't be second class, and the results, the product has to be first class [she laughs] but they don't give us any training, no courses, nothing, but I have heard that for the company people yes, yeah.

And do you know if the company is in Asocolflores?
I don't know...what's the name again?

Is it linked to Asocolflores, if people from Asocolflores come and visit the company...

I don't know but I could find out about it. *Asocolflores* is the name, isn't it?

Yes, it is the association of the flower exporters...
It says *Florverde* on the company uniforms

Florverde, that's one of the programmes of Asocolflores...

Ah! Then I believe yes, because on the label of the uniforms it says *Florverde* and it has some green flowers but ours doesn't have, it is a blue apron

But have you heard something about Florverde, any courses?

No, not for us. (Violeta)

As we have seen in chapter 4, there are hierarchies present between permanent and temporary workers not only in terms of economic benefits but also status and other non-economic benefits. *Asocolflores* argues that the benefits of *Florverde* are extended to their sub-contractors but Violeta's testimony refutes this claim.

Amaranta does not seem surprised by the lack of familiarity of the workers with the programme:

The workers know that it is a label that the company imposed, they know that it is something to improve the company because they say 'you know since they have this label and since the *gringos* started to buy the companies, they have changed the carpets in the offices, they have introduced new telephone networks for the offices, and they have increased the sprayings and also we keep the company very clean and tidy, they order us to go and collect the rubbish, to clean, all the time we have cleaning campaigns, so with this the company has improved a lot'. But for them to know what really *Florverde* is, I don't think so. (Amaranta)

Magnolia, a community based worker, is critical of *Florverde* but is also critical of the capacity of the ICC to reach the workers:

Even now the people who work in the companies have the *Florverde* brand on their uniforms and they have posters in the companies about it but one knows through the workers who work there that the conditions remain the same or even worse than the companies that are not in *Florverde*. Nevertheless, we have to get to know much more about *Florverde* and also to take a position as an organisation and especially to continue discussing the Code proposal, because it hasn't been widely discussed among the workers. I think that if we talk about the International Code of Conduct, the workers in general don't know anything about it. If we talk about the workers that are within an organisation process and

the youngsters who participate in the initiatives and the women here, then they know that the Code exists, that there are discussions about it, that it has some possibilities but nothing more. (Magnolia)

Summary and conclusion

Ethical consumerism presupposes a dialogue between the parties involved; in this case in the cut flower trade between workers, companies, retailers, supermarkets and consumers. Such dialogue is absent from the Colombian cut flower sector, and if it took place would struggle to be on equal terms for the workers and campaigners. This chapter has analysed the discourses through which the company owners, from the upper and upper middle-classes, and *Asocolflores*, the body that represents the interests of the flower growers, construct their identities in opposition to those of the working and popular classes. They build sets of opposing values where the working classes are ‘backward’ and ‘inefficient’ and working class men ‘violent’ and ‘exploitative’ towards women. In contrast, the *Asocolflores* members and staff see themselves as ‘modern’, ‘efficient’, ‘civilised’, ‘law abiding’, concerned about the welfare of the workers and helping to solve their problems. The company owners also ‘other’ the cut-flower campaigners, constructing them as irresponsible, malicious, spreading misinformation and damaging the whole national interest. Working class women are seen as victims both of their partners and of the campaigners, who encourage them to express grievances over their working conditions when the ‘true’ source of their problems lies in the distress that the shift from macho traditionalism to modernity has caused. Hence the logic of the ‘remedy’ of ‘conflict resolution’ and improved human resource management. The conflict resolution workshops are equivalent to workshop training – they are presented as

‘training in social skills’ for the new conditions and relations of modernity. In the view of *Asocolflores* everyone gains with better training making a more modern, efficient and happier workforce.

The *Asocolflores* members and staff have selectively taken up aspects of the demands of the campaigns/ICC, and woven them into the discourse of rational progressive capitalism, while ignoring or discounting those aspects that focus on labour-capital relations, workplace relations and the need for independent monitoring. The result is the *Florverde* initiative that focuses on environmental problems and a sub-programme *Cultivemos*, presented as its main social programme. The *Florverde* initiative is the response of the sector to the campaigns but a response that ended up being very different from what the campaigners were aiming at.

The way the market was structured in 1996, when *Florverde* was launched, is dramatically different to the structure today, as we have seen in chapter 3. Before, it was more difficult to trace where flowers came from, but the tendency in Britain and increasingly in Europe today is to eliminate intermediaries and for the big retailers to buy directly from the producer. Flowers are therefore becoming easier to trace from the retailer to the producer and with that it is becoming easier to determine which flowers are being produced ethically and which are not. What is becoming increasingly important is not which code of conduct the farms have promised to implement, but whether its processes of implementation are certified by a credible third party. The campaigns have increased the awareness of the public, as pointed out by the ILO:

There are indications that consumers are becoming more demanding, particularly in Germany and Switzerland. This is manifested in two ways. There is more attention for the conditions under which flowers are being grown... And there is a search for new varieties and novelties. The retail market is becoming more sophisticated. As one grower put it: 'They used to ask for just red roses; now they ask for Grand Gala ...' (interview with Ned Latif of Inlandes SA, Quito, the largest flower growers in Ecuador, in Floraculture International, June 1997, pp. 18-21). (ILO, 2000)

The *Florverde* programme might have been enough to satisfy the expectations of the retailers and the importers in the UK and to counteract the effect of the campaigns at a PR level, but its origins and its premises make it clear that it can never deliver the changes that the workers and the campaigners are aiming at. But the same market that has brought the commodity closer to the public, has also brought the public closer to the commodity. And the consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the social and environmental issues surrounding cut flower production in Colombia. One of the aims of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of the factors that will allow the campaigns to bring consumers closer to the commodity.

The market is also posing challenges to the Colombian flower producers. The increasing investment by British and Dutch companies in cut flower farms in Africa, particularly in Kenya, and the development of technologies that increase the pre-vase and vase life of cut flowers, means that distance may not be an obstacle to African flowers competing with Colombian flowers, not only in the European market where they are already dominant, but also in the USA market. The main supermarkets in Britain are part of the ETI, and their suppliers are bound to comply with the ETI code and monitoring and verification procedures, giving Kenyan

flowers within the ETI an obvious advantage. In the future, flowers from Kenya might also compete with Colombian flowers in the USA with the added advantage of having the ETI behind them. The ‘market advantage’ that *Florverde* was designed to offer may be eroded, such that *Asocolflores* has to think again.

The Colombian sector is also changing with the entrance of the multinational corporations such as Dole since 1997. *Asocolflores* members and staff have been aware of the changes needed in labour relations in the sector since the first union was formed back in the 1970s. They have been able to survive as a sector mainly due to the exporting subsidies (ATPA and EU low tariff imports), low taxation of land and production in Colombia, the availability of cheap subsidised lines of credit and cheap labour. They have been able to maintain tariff privileges in the USA and the EU mainly through the discourses around employment and ‘flowers versus cocaine’. Through the discourses around the ‘backward’, ‘inefficient’, ‘violent’ and ‘exploitative’ working classes, they have been able to get away with ‘cheap’ labour, with deciding on what the social needs of the workers are and what the solutions are for these needs, and with ‘disciplining’ them through conflict resolution programmes. They may be about to learn that these strategies, whilst they may have had some success in the short term, may carry longer term costs that cut to the very heart of their concerns – the ability to compete in international markets. Ethical trade may indeed become good business practice.

¹ Former Colombian president Cesar Gaviria in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal*, November 2, 1990

² Marta, Lucie and Cristina did not allow me to tape their interviews, therefore the information I transcribe here comes from my fieldwork notes.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been in the making for more than ten years, first with my general political involvement in human rights in Colombia and then through my particular work in the cut flower sector. It has been political and personal as well as academic. As a result of my work and involvement with cut flowers I had to leave Colombia in the late 1990s. This meant a change in my life and my personal and political relations. I have taken this as an opportunity to expand my ways of understanding the different aspects that influence not only the social, economic and cultural relations in the cut flower sector in Colombia but also wider political and cultural issues. This research has enriched me in many senses, personally and politically. It has broadened my material understanding of issues by introducing me to the need to expand this analysis to include cultural analysis to cut flower production. I believe the shift in analysis politicises even more the analysis of the cut flower industry. The findings of my research have confirmed my convictions about the need to continue a dialogue with and amongst the workers, the ethical trading initiatives, the campaigners, the consumers, the *cultivo* owners and their representative *Asocolflores*. I believe that if we do not continue this dialogue not only the conditions under which people work but also the very future of the cut flower industry in Colombia is uncertain. As shown in chapter 6, ethical consumption may make good business.

This thesis therefore has a double focus: on the one hand, meeting the demands of academic scholarship and on the other hand, from the point of view of Participatory

Action Research, identifying issues for strategic campaigning within the ethical trading initiatives. I have succeeded at least to an extent in bringing together these two parts, the political and the theoretical. I will be able to take the results of my academic work into the arena of political activity to try to inform the discussion of strategies that have been developing around ethical consumerism and cut flowers. The thesis is also original in its attempt to synthesise analyses of cut flower production with those of consumption. While its scope has precluded a full integration, whereby production is examined in the North, consumption in the South, I have provided an analysis that recognizes production as a cultural as well as material process.

Thus, the structure of the analytical chapters of the thesis is shaped by the findings in the review of the existing literature on the commodity chain concept, cut flowers in Colombia, the meanings of flowers, culture, consumption, the gift and the ethical consumerism movement that I have laid out in chapter 1 as well as the methodological problems highlighted in chapter 2. For example, I have elaborated a criticism of the commodity chain theorists approaches who tend to place production in the South and to analyse it through material aspects and to place consumption in the North and to analyse it through cultural aspects. This criticism informs the chapters as I seek to incorporate a cultural analysis, without losing sight of the material analysis in the analysis of the production 'side' of the commodity chain in chapter 4 and 6.

Other criticisms, such as the lack of attention paid by Colombian authors to aspects of consumption in the North are addressed in chapter 5, which analyses the ethical consumers' lack of awareness of the characteristics of cut flower production and the lack of awareness of the campaigners about the importance of these aspects in the building up of the cut flower campaigns. The concepts of the gift, culture, consumption and ethical consumerism are also used throughout the analytical chapters to unwrap the different discourses that the informants deploy to analyse their roles and the role of other stakeholders in cut flower production and consumption.

In this thesis I have provided a detailed understanding of how social relations surrounding different actors participating in cut flower production and consumption get produced, reproduced and restructured. These social relations are not accidental. The production processes, for example, are embedded in Colombian history and in the social, economic and political characteristics of the rural areas that have expelled their population to the urban areas, as well as the 'development' approach pursued by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank and its attendant export-oriented production strategy over the last 40 years. Due to 'favourable' conditions in Colombia, such as availability of 'cheap' labour and 'cheap' natural resources, the cut flower industry expanded its production during the 1980s.

It is in this context that the influence of the cut flower industry in Colombia has to be understood. The industry has gone from exporting flowers worth US\$20K in the

1960s to more than US\$600 million in the year 2000. On the other hand, these export-oriented strategies have linked places of production like Colombia with consumer countries like the UK. The value of cut flower imports to the UK has increased over 50% in the past decade and by the year 2000 the value stood at US\$533 million.

Both production and consumption of cut flowers occurs in Colombia and the UK, but in terms of the development of the sector internationally, the emphasis is on production in Colombia and consumption in the UK. What I have been interested in are the various ways in which production and consumption, and the flower itself, are conceived by consumers, workers, *cultivo* owners, *Asocolflores* employees, supervisors, NGO workers and florists. The insight that I bring to this thesis is that the flower needs to be understood as a commodity and as a gift; the discourses that my informants deploy are both shaped by and shape this double life of the flower.

To understand the double life of the flower, and its impact on the work and lives of the workers in Colombia, we need a cultural analysis of production and consumption but one that doesn't lose sight of the economic aspects of production. One important outcome is to highlight not only the material consequences of the conditions of the cut flower industry for the lives of the workers but also the discourses deployed by *Asocolflores* and the *cultivo* owners that deprive the workers of their humanity, exercising symbolic violence against them. This analysis also allows us to locate different sites of resistance on the part of the workers, in the form of their

conceptualisation of their incorporation into the sector, their work, their working conditions and the organisation of their work.

A combination of economic and social structures (institutions, discourses, fields and ideologies) with personal holdings of capital have influenced the way in which the informants entered the cut flower sector and the position they occupy in the hierarchy of the *cultivo*. The women workers I interviewed, for example, came from rural areas, from where they had been expelled due to the lack of agrarian reforms and the de-legitimisation of their cultural capital. This de-legitimisation is because of patriarchal institutions that refuse to recognise and value the work of women without the presence of men.

In the cut flower sector however, some forms of their cultural capital are recognised, such as their perceived gender attributes ('nimble fingers', docility). This facilitates the selection of women as workers and thus women comprise the majority of the workers in the industry, while men perform tasks that are perceived as 'technical' or 'risky' such as machinery operation and changing and maintaining the plastics in the greenhouses. In spite of the poor conditions that the women informants find themselves in, they recognise that employment in flowers is better than that in the main alternative, domestic service.

Based on the conceptualisations of the workers, supervisors and owners, the organisation of work in the cut flower sector in Colombia is shown to be very hierarchical. The structure is maintained on a top-down basis, from the owners of the

cultivo down through the supervisors, to the monitors and then to the bottom of the chain, the women workers. The hierarchy sustains an environment of surveillance and control to ensure that work is done, rather than an emphasis on encouragement, motivation and reward.

Production is organised by the supervisors and the management and is structured around the presumption that the workers are incapable of making decisions and that they do not understand their work. This has a powerful effect in terms of excluding the workers. However, there are oppositional discourses at work; while the owners and managers look upon the peasants as 'irrational' and 'backward', the workers see themselves as having a lot of knowledge, using their judgements and skills. Indeed it is clear that the workers make hundreds of decisions a day that affect the quality of the product.

Another important purpose of my thesis is to understand the cultural and material aspects of consumption in the UK among a group of ethical consumers. This has been a process of understanding the meanings and uses of flowers for this particular group of consumers and also examining whether they have any knowledge of the cultural and material processes of production. The group that I interviewed had developed complex repertoires around the meanings and uses of flowers. However, even though they are very well informed about ethical issues concerning other export-oriented commodities, they are generally unaware of the conditions under which cut flowers are produced.

The ways they use flowers as gifts is sophisticated and it tends to associate them with positive values of creating and maintaining friendships and relationships. Among my informants, cut flowers are used to express positive feelings and to reinforce social networks with friends and family. The informants demonstrated an extensive and detailed knowledge of flowers and were familiar with the 'appropriate' uses of cut flowers; although at the same time they seemed to be constructing their 'taste' in flowers in opposition to the traditional 'language of flowers'. Their use of cut flowers became almost unnoticeable and appeared to take the form of a routine giving and receiving of flowers and was thus taken for granted. My findings indicate therefore, that this is a well-informed, politically active group of 'ethical consumers' who are much less informed about the cut flower industry than one might have expected, given their sophisticated use of flowers and their active commitment to ethical trade and environmental issues.

The hypothesis that this thesis is floating is proposing for further investigation as a likely explanation for these findings is that it is precisely *because* of the ethical consumers' 'cultural investments' in the meanings of flowers that the political/ethical take on this particular commodity is obscured. Flowers for this group are 'too close to home', such that this proximity impedes them from thinking about what lies behind the flowers at the point of production. They are preoccupied with the flower as a gift, not as a commodity. It is the 'everydayness' of flower giving and receiving that makes it difficult for them to make a connection between production and consumption. Whilst they have invested time and energy into uncovering the issues of production and ethical trade surrounding commodities such

as tea, coffee and clothes, they have not been exposed to the possibility that similar ethical contentions may be contained within a bunch of cut flowers. The everyday familiarity of cut flowers distanced the commodity of production from the gift of consumption, similar to the dissociation of meat on the plate from its animal source, and this distance was exacerbated by the geographical and social distance between such places as Colombia as the country of origin and the UK as the destination. This hypothesis, however, needs to be further explored by future research.

Notwithstanding their general ignorance about production, some of the consumers interviewed used a 'developmental' set of oppositions whereby 'good' flowers come from the Netherlands and England and 'bad' flowers come from 'South America'. There is a risk therefore of precipitating a boycott of 'South American' flowers, which is not at all what the campaigns were intending.

The movement that looks to bring closer the characteristics of production and consumption is ethical consumerism. It has focused on campaigning to mobilise consumers to take action to improve the working and living conditions of the workers, pressurising the retailing companies to change practices along the supply chain. In this thesis I have analysed a response from the cut flower producers' group *Asocolflores* to the ethical campaigns, namely the creation of their own 'home-grown' programme, *Florverde*. I have shown that this programme does not measure up to the standards of the ICC regarding its social aims and goals and, therefore, it cannot address adequately the claims and the needs of the workers. While it has a very comprehensive section on environmental issues, setting goals and ways to

attain them, the main social programme *Cultivemos* is wrapped up in a 'conflict resolution' strategy that assumes that any problems are of the workers' own making, not the product of the strategies of capital or the way employers operate.

I give special emphasis to the different discourses deployed by the cut flower *cultivo* owners, *Asocolflores* employees and supervisors to construct their identities in opposition to those of working class men and women. In the construction of these identities they deny any agency to working class men and women; the latter are constructed as incomplete human beings who are not modern enough to be taken into account in any initiative that involves making decisions about their own lives. They are not seen as full members of the society that cut flower owners, *Asocolflores* employees and supervisors occupy. Cut flower workers are constructed by the cut flower owners and *Asocolflores* staff as 'incomplete', yet to embrace modernity and, presumably, full citizenship. The owners justify paying low salaries to the workers with the argument that they are 'training' them to be 'modern', they want them to abandon their 'backward' peasant values, their 'inefficient' ways of working, their 'violent' behaviour and embrace efficiency, dialogue and commitment to the company.

One of the points I have stressed in the thesis is that the ethical campaigns cannot and should not focus only on material aspects of production, ignoring the dominant discourses and ideologies that legitimate the existence of disadvantaged working and living conditions for the workers. One way of overcoming this is by including workers and consumers at the centre of the ethical trading initiatives. Through a

cultural analysis of cut flower production I have shown that workers do contest the image that company owners want to construct of them, and the ethical trading initiatives cannot but recognise the workers as agents in the initiatives that are supposedly designed to 'benefit' them.

It is presently a difficult time for political action such as organising and unionising in Colombia. In this context we might expect that the ethical consumerist movement would play a central role in strengthening the scattered manifestations of resistance. However, there has been a disjuncture between the initiatives that take into account the production part of the commodity and the ones that concentrate on ethical consumption. The latter are localised geographically as well as ideologically in the North, ignoring and marginalising workers, who are supposed to be the basis for the campaigns.

The campaigns have to broaden their knowledge of the consumers, especially the relations that cut flowers sustain when they take the form of gifts. The positive meanings that flowers evoke obscure the meanings of flowers as commodities. Although the strategy of ethical trade is to target the main cut flower retailers, such as supermarkets, the consequences of such campaigns could be a boycott of Colombian cut flowers. The campaigns need to be wary of an ethical consumption movement that results in the boycott of Colombian flowers as 'bad' flowers, as the workers risk losing their jobs altogether. The challenge is to develop a campaign that puts pressure on entrepreneurs to invest in 'clean' flowers, whose positive

meanings at the point of consumption coincide with positive meanings at the point of production.

However, this strategy must be carefully worked out because, as I have shown, an organisation like *Asocolflores* is not going to embrace ethical production overnight. *Asocolflores* partakes in a discourse that perceives workers as sub-human and incapable of decision making and working efficiently; this is entrenched in the social and cultural context where production takes place. There is therefore the risk that this symbolic violence will become material violence and that the workers will face the consequences of any campaign targeting the sector.

Apart from constantly exposing the undemocratic processes of cut flower production in Colombia, there is an urgent need for the campaigns to recognise that the workers are aware of their own working conditions and are capable of proposing the contents and processes that the initiatives should take. Especially given the lack of democratic space in Colombia, pressurising *Asocolflores* to take the initiative for change is not enough. Thus I maintain that it is crucial for initiatives such as the ETI and the cut flower campaign to place the workers at the centre in any actions that they take on, to recognize their investments and knowledge and to strengthen their organisational capacity to stand up to the companies.

Furthermore, if there is any validity in the hypothesis that the meanings of cut flowers as gifts obscures the meanings of cut flowers as commodities, then this strongly reinforces another central contention of the thesis that we cannot read the

different 'commodities' that have been or might be subject to 'commodity chain analysis', as abstract repositories of value, whose sensuous, useful and meaningful properties are immaterial. The life of cut flowers as gifts, as ephemeral objects of values for their beauty and for the meanings they bear must be taken into account in the campaigns that are directed towards raising consumer awareness of the conditions of their production and influencing them to bring pressure to bear on supermarkets and other suppliers.



Appendix 2

Date of interviews with informants

Name	Date	place
Tim	27-04-00	Leamington Spa
Ash	9-05-00	Coventry
Michael	15-05-00	Coventry
Heather	17-05-00	Leamington Spa
Jon	17-05-00	Leamington Spa
Holly	18-05-00	Leamington Spa
Sarah	20-05-00	Leamington Spa
Hazel	13-06-00	Leamington Spa
Mitch	19-06-00	Leamington Spa
Virginia	10-07-00	Leamington Spa
Iris	20-07-00	Sandy, Bedfordshire
Rosemary	27-07-00	Sandy, Bedfordshire
Rosa Maria	18-09-00	Bogotá
William	2-12-00	Bogotá
Magnolia (first part)	4-12-00	Bogotá
Daisy	5-12-00	Bogotá
Begonia	6-12-00	e-mail
Floro	11-01-01	Cartagena
Rosa (first part)	13-01-01	Out of Bogotá
Cristina	17-01-01	Bogotá
Marta	17-01-01	Bogotá
Magnolia (second part)	19-01-01	Bogotá
Lucie de Velez	20-01-01	Out of Bogotá
Amaranta (first part)	28-01-01	Out of Bogotá
Yasmin	31-01-01	Out of Bogotá
Petunia (first part)	1-02-01	Bogotá
Petunia (second part)	2-02-01	Bogotá
Rosa (second part)	3-02-01	Out of Bogotá
Margarita	4-02-01	Out of Bogotá
Jacinto	5-02-01	Bogotá
Amaranta (second part)	8-02-01	Out of Bogotá
Lilia	14-02-01	Out of Bogotá
Veronica	15-02-01	Out of Bogotá
Dalia	18-02-01	Out of Bogotá
Guillermo	20-02-01	Bogotá
Narciso	21-02-01	Bogotá
Azalea	26-02-01	Out of Bogotá

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This springtime we've some great additions to the Marks & Spencer flower collection, with beautiful new bouquets to suit any occasion, especially **Mother's Day** this **2 April**. All our bouquets are developed by experts, and individually arranged and hand-tied with co-ordinating tissue paper. Each gift is delivered direct to the door, complete with your own personal message handwritten inside an attractive gift card. Don't forget, we now have fabulous wine and Champagne gifts too. So now you're truly spoilt for choice.



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Very special – a cleverly arranged cluster of roses in beautiful peaches and cream is perfectly complemented by an assortment of pastel shade gerbera and carnations, with lush foliage.



with love bouquet (shown opposite)

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Ideal for Mother's Day and so many other occasions, this exquisite arrangement combines scented oriental lilies with gorgeous pink gerbera, finished off with touches of eucalyptus.

* plus £4 handling and delivery

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Don't forget **Mother's Day** – **2 April**

your feelings

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INTERNATIONAL CODE OF CONDUCT

FOR THE PRODUCTION OF CUT-FLOWERS

Preamble

The following code aims to guarantee that flowers have been produced under socially and environmentally sustainable conditions.

The code provides a concise statement of minimum labour, human rights and environmental standards for the international cut-flower industry. Companies should pledge to require their suppliers, contractors and sub-contractors to observe these standards. The code is concise in order to display it in workplaces and in order to avoid any confusion between these basic principles and the application of principles.

An independent body, established to provide independent verification of compliance with the code and to assist companies to implement the code, will provide an auditable check-list of practices and conditions that are consistent with the standards set forth in the code.

The company pledges to observe the core ILO standards, the universal human rights standards and basic environmental standards, which are the base for this code. The company pledges to make observance of the code a condition of any agreement that it makes with contractors and suppliers and to require them to extend this obligation to their sub-contractors. The company accepts that the implementation of the code is subject to independent verification.

The code establishes only minimum standards that must not be used as a ceiling or to discourage collective bargaining. The company shall comply with all national laws and legal regulations. When national law and these criteria address the same issue, that provision which is most stringent applies.

The text of the code, which is intended to be posted where workers can see it, shall also include a means by which workers can report failure to comply with the code in a confidential manner.

Code of Conduct

1. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The rights of all workers to form and join trade unions and to bargain collectively shall be recognised (ILO Conventions 87 and 98). Workers representatives shall not be subject of discrimination and shall have access to all workplaces necessary to enable them to carry out their representation functions. (ILO Convention 135)

2. EQUALITY OF TREATMENT

Workers shall have access to jobs and training on equal terms, irrespective of gender, age, ethnic origin, colour, marital status, sexual orientation, political opinion, religion or social origin (ILO Conventions 100 and 111). Physical harassment or psychological oppression, particularly of women workers, must not be tolerated.

3. LIVING WAGES

Wages and benefits paid for a standard working week shall meet at least legal or industry minimum standards and always be sufficient to meet basic needs of workers and their families and to provide some discretionary income. Pay should be in cash, direct to the workers, promptly and in full. Information to wages shall be available to workers in an understandable and detailed form.

4. WORKING HOURS

Hours of work shall comply with applicable law and industry standards. In any event, workers shall not on a regular basis be required to work in excess of 48 hours per week and shall be provided with at least one day off every week. Overtime shall be voluntary, shall not exceed 12 hours per week, shall not be demanded on a regular basis and shall always be compensated at a premium rate.

5. HEALTH AND SAFETY

A safe and hygienic working environment shall be provided. Companies shall provide free and appropriate protective clothing and equipment, and comply with internationally recognised health and safety standards. (ILO Convention 170) Workers and their organisations must be consulted, trained and allowed to investigate safety issues. There should be regular monitoring of workers' health and safety. Companies shall supply drinking water, provide clean toilets and offer showers and washing facilities. Where housing is provided, it should comply at least with the minimum standards for size, ventilation, cooking facilities, water supply and sanitary facilities. (ILO Convention 110, Articles 85-88)

6. PESTICIDES AND CHEMICALS

Every company should assess the risks of the chemicals used and apply measures to prevent any damage to the health of their workers. Companies shall record and reduce pesticide and fertilizer use by adequate techniques and methods. No banned, highly toxic (WHO I) or carcinogenic pesticide and chemical should be used. Safety instructions and re-entry intervals must be strictly observed and monitored. Spraying, handling and storing pesticides and chemicals should be done by specially trained people with suitable equipment. Stores, apparatus and equipment must be clean, safe, handy and conforming to international standards.

7. SECURITY OF EMPLOYMENT

Work which is by its nature not seasonal or temporary shall be done by workers on permanent contracts. Provisions for non-permanent and seasonal workers, including freedom of association, should be not less favourable than for permanent workers. Every worker shall get a copy of their contract.

8. PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Companies should make every effort to protect the environment and the residential areas, avoid pollution and implement sustainable use of natural resources (water, soil, air, etc.).

9. CHILD LABOUR IS NOT USED

There shall be no use of child labour. There shall be no workers under the age of 15 years or under the compulsory school-leaving age, whichever is higher. Children under 18 shall not work in hazardous conditions. (ILO Convention 138) Adequate transitional economic assistance and appropriate educational opportunities shall be provided to any replaced child workers.

10. NO FORCED LABOUR

There shall be no forced labour, included bonded or involuntary prison labour (ILO Conventions 29 and 105). Nor shall workers be required to lodge "deposits" or their identity papers with their employer.

Section of Implementation

1. To overview the implementation of the Code of Conduct an independent body, accepted by all parties involved (for example trade unions, NGOs, employers), shall be formed.
2. This body will set the terms for an independent process of verification of compliance with the Code of Conduct.
3. The companies shall report regularly about the progress made in the implementation of the Code.
4. The independent body shall make provisions for workers, trade unions and other concerned groups to lodge complaints about violations of the Code, which if serious, have to be followed-up.
5. The Code shall be translated into local languages and prominently displayed in the place of work.

Language:

The English version of the text of this Code is the authoritative version.

August 1998

proposed by:

- * IUF - International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations, Geneva
- * Flower Campaign, Germany (Bread for the World, FIAN, terre des hommes)
- * IG BAU - Trade Union for Construction, Agriculture and Environment, Germany
- * FNV - Trade Union Confederation, Netherlands
- * OLAA - Organisatie Latijns Amerika Activiteiten, Netherlands
- * INZET, Netherlands
- * Fair Trade Center, Sweden
- * Flower Coordination, Switzerland
- * Christian Aid, UK

Contact:

FIAN, Overwegstr. 31, 44625 Herne, Germany

Tel. ++49/2323/490099, Fax: ++49/2323/490018
email: fian@fian.de

INTERNATIONAL CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE PRODUCTION OF CUT-FLOWERS (ICC)

- 1. Freedom of association and collective bargaining**
- 2. Equality of treatment**
- 3. Living wages**
- 4. Working hours**
- 5. Health and Safety**
- 6. Pesticides and Chemicals**
- 7. Security of employment**
- 8. Protection of the environment**
- 9. Child labour is not used**
- 10. No forced labour**

proposed by:

* IUF - International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and

Allied Workers' Associations, Geneva

* Flower Campaign, Germany (Bread for the World, FIAN, terre des hommes)

* IG BAU - Trade Union for Construction, Agriculture and Environment, Germany

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Tel. ++49/2323/490099, Fax: ++49/2323/490018

email: fian@home.ins.de

ICC Flowers:

F u n d a m e n t a l s

- * International standards for the cut-flower industry**
- * Based on ILO Conventions**
- * Voluntary agreement**
- * Social and environmental quality for the consumers**
- * Independent monitoring**
- * Participation of unions, NGOs and workers**
- * Translation of ICC in local languages and presentation at place of work**

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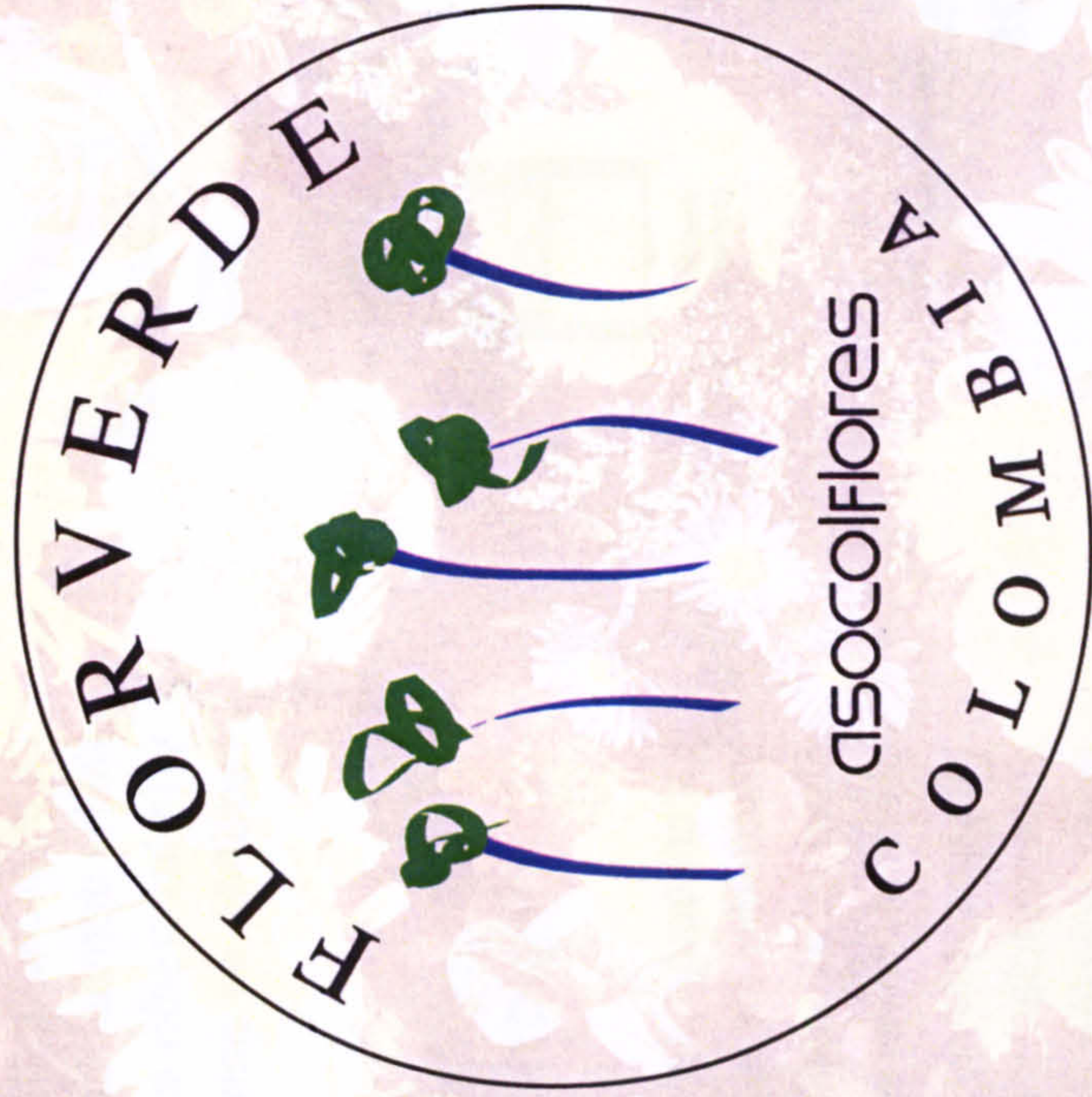
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instalaciones: baterías
cocina y deportivas
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las



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El Programa:

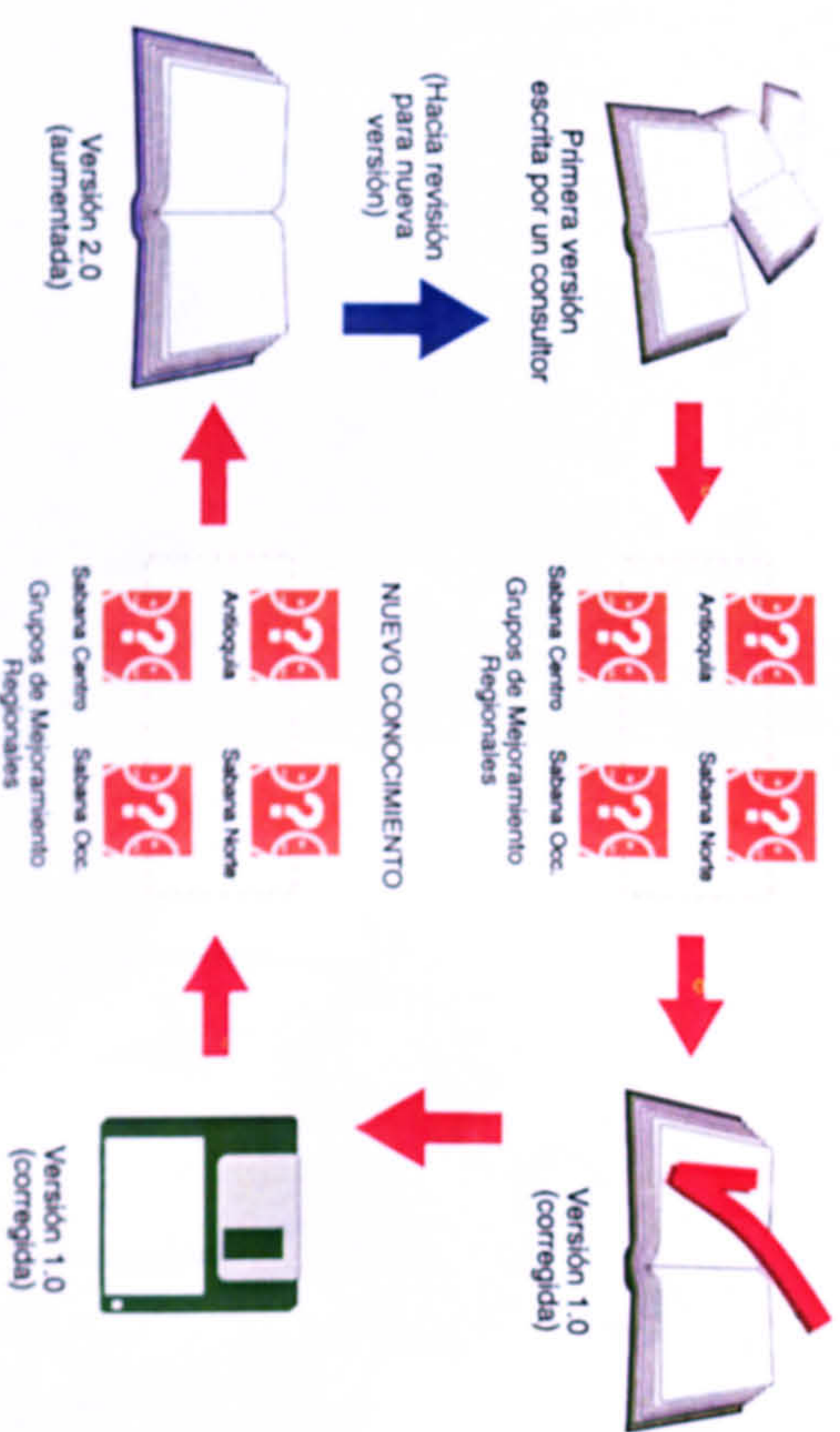
- más limpia (*cleaner*)
- más seguro
- más continuo
- más transparente
- más eficaz en la medición y
- más equitativa
- más responsable
- más respetuosa con los entornos naturales
- más respetuosa con el patrimonio cultural, artesanal, gubernamental

Beneficios:

- ahorro de plaguicidas
- ahorro de agua
- hacer un uso sostenible
- reducción de residuos (reducir, reusar, reciclar)
- ahorro de energía
- mejora del paisaje
- ahorro del recurso humano

Objetivos:

- mejorar la conducta
- promover buenas prácticas (Buenas Prácticas)
- capacitar a los floricultores.
- promover mejores prácticas
- fomentar la tendencia.



Diagnósticos y asesorías especializadas

Especialistas en cada tema asesoran y realizan un diagnóstico que permite comparar las empresas para establecer un punto de referencia del desempeño individual. A partir del diagnóstico, en cada empresa se conforma un comité que plantea y hace seguimiento de su propio plan de acción.

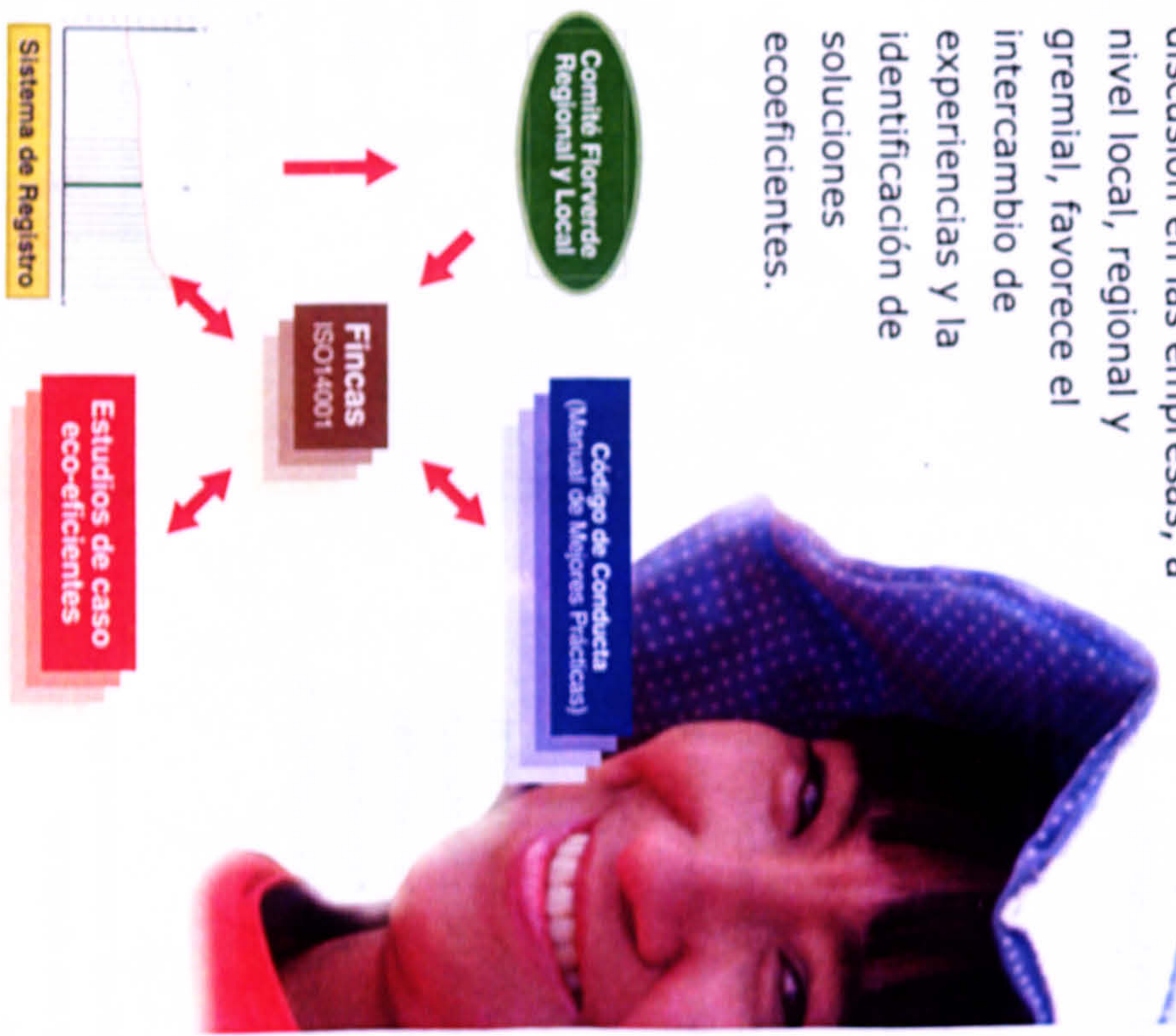


Estudios de caso

La publicación de casos exitosos de gestión ambiental ha demostrado que la protección del ecosistema y la inversión en el bienestar de los trabajadores redundan en beneficios para la empresa.

Comités Florverde (gremial, regional y empresarial)

La creación de espacios de discusión en las empresas, a nivel local, regional y gremial, favorece el intercambio de experiencias y la identificación de soluciones ecoeficientes.



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- Mejorar el uso sostenible del suelo y del agua
- Reducir el consumo de agroquímicos (plaguicidas y fertilizantes)
- Manejo integral de residuos (**R**educir, **R**eutilizar, **R**eciclar)
- Uso racional de energía
- Cercas vivas con especies nativas para mejorar el paisaje

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